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THE WORKS OF SAINT AUGUSTINE
A Translation for the 21st Century

Part I – Books
Volume 1:

The Confessions

THE WORKS OF SAINT AUGUSTINE
A Translation for the 21st Century

**The
Confessions**

(Second Edition)

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translation, notes and introduction by
Maria Boulding, O.S.B.

edited by
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Book I

Infancy and Boyhood

Opening prayer and meditation

1, 1. Great are you, O Lord, and exceedingly worthy of praise;¹ your power is immense, and your wisdom beyond reckoning.² And so we humans, who are a due part of your creation, long to praise you—we who carry our mortality about with us,³ carry the evidence of our sin and with it the proof that you thwart the proud.⁴ Yet these humans, due part of your creation as they are, still do long to praise you. You stir us so that praising you may bring us joy, because you have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is unquiet until it rests in you.

Grant me to know and understand, Lord, which comes first: to call upon you or to praise you? To know you or to call upon you? Must we know you before we can call upon you? Anyone who invokes what is still unknown may be making a mistake. Or should you be invoked first, so that we may then come to know you? But how can people call upon someone in whom they do not yet believe? And how can they believe without a preacher?⁵ But scripture tells us that those who seek the Lord will praise him,⁶ for as they seek they find him,⁷ and on finding him they will praise him. Let me seek you, then, Lord, even while I am calling upon you, and call upon you even as I believe in you; for to us you have indeed been preached. My faith calls upon you, Lord, this faith which is your gift to me, which you have breathed into me through the humanity of your Son and the ministry of your preacher.

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1. See Pss 47:2(48:1); 95(96):4; 144(145):3.
 2. See Ps 146(147):5.
 3. See 2 Cor 4:10.
 4. See 1 Pt 5:5.
 5. See Rom 10:14.
 6. See Ps 21:27(22:26).
 7. See Mt 7:7-8; Lk 11:10.

2. 2. How shall I call upon my God, my God and my Lord, when by the very act of calling upon him I would be calling him into myself?⁸ Is there any place within me into which my God might come? How should the God who made heaven and earth⁹ come into me? Is there any room in me for you, Lord, my God? Even heaven and earth, which you have made and in which you have made me—can even they contain you? Since nothing that exists would exist without you, does it follow that whatever exists does in some way contain you? But if this is so, how can I, who am one of these existing things, ask you to come into me, when I would not exist at all unless you were already in me? Not yet am I in hell, after all, but even if I were, you would be there too; for if I descend to the underworld, you are there.¹⁰ No, my God, I would not exist, I would not be at all, were you not in me. Or should I say, rather, that I should not exist if I were not in you, from whom are all things, through whom are all things, in whom are all things?¹¹ Yes, Lord, that is the truth, that is indeed the truth. To what place can I invite you, then, since I am in you? Or where could you come from, in order to come into me? To what place outside heaven and earth could I travel, so that my God could come to me there, the God who said, *I fill heaven and earth?*¹²

3. 3. So then, if you fill heaven and earth, does that mean that heaven and earth contain you? Or, since clearly they cannot hold you, is there something of you left over when you have filled them? Once heaven and earth are full, where would that remaining part of you overflow? Or perhaps you have no need to be contained by anything, but rather contain everything yourself, because whatever you fill you contain, even as you fill it? The vessels which are full of you do not lend you stability, because even if they break you will not be spilt. And when you pour yourself out over us,¹³ you do not lie there spilt but raise us up; you are not scattered, but gather us together.¹⁴ Yet all those things which you fill, you fill with the whole of yourself. Should we suppose, then, that because all things are incapable of

8. The point is more forceful in Latin: *invocare*, “to call upon,” is literally “to call into.”

9. See Gn 1:1.

10. See Ps 138(139):8.

11. See Rom 11:36; 1 Cor 8:6.

12. Jer 23:24.

13. See Jl 2:28-29; Acts 2:17-18.

14. The immediate background here is probably the yearning of dispersed Israel for ingathering at the end-time, as expressed in many psalms; but there may also be echoes of the

containing the whole of you, they hold only a part of you, and all of them the same part? Or does each thing hold a different part, greater things larger parts, and lesser things smaller parts? Does it even make sense to speak of larger or smaller parts of you? Are you not everywhere in your whole being, while there is nothing whatever that can hold you entirely?

4. 4. What are you, then, my God? What are you, I ask, but the Lord God? For who else is lord except the Lord, or who is god if not our God?¹⁵ You are most high, excellent, most powerful, omnipotent, supremely merciful and supremely just, most hidden yet intimately present, infinitely beautiful and infinitely strong, steadfast yet elusive, unchanging yourself though you control the change in all things, never new, never old, renewing all things¹⁶ yet wearing down the proud though they know it not;¹⁷ ever active, ever at rest, gathering while knowing no need, supporting and filling and guarding, creating and nurturing and perfecting, seeking although you lack nothing. You love without frenzy, you are jealous yet secure, you regret without sadness,¹⁸ you grow angry yet remain tranquil, you alter your works but never your plan; you take back what you find although you never lost it; you are never in need yet you rejoice in your gains, never avaricious yet you demand profits.¹⁹ You allow us to pay you more than you demand, and so you become our debtor, yet which of us possesses anything that does not already belong to you? You owe us nothing, yet you pay your debts; you write off our debts to you, yet you lose nothing thereby.

After saying all that, what have we said, my God, my life, my holy sweetness? What does anyone who speaks of you really say? Yet woe betide those who fail to speak, while the chatterboxes go on saying nothing.²⁰

5. 5. Who will grant me to find peace in you? Who will grant me this grace, that you would come into my heart and inebriate it, enabling me to

Neo-Platonic doctrine of the return of the many to the One, and possibly of Manichean beliefs concerning the dispersal of the divine being into fragments.

15. See Ps 17:32 (18:31).

16. See Wis 7:27.

17. See Jb 9:5.

18. See Gn 6:6-7.

19. See Mt 25:27.

20. Possibly an allusion to the Manichees, whose verbosity Augustine mentions in V,7,12.

forget the evils that beset me²¹ and embrace you, my only good? What are you to me? Have mercy on me, so that I may tell. What indeed am I to you, that you should command me to love you, and grow angry with me if I do not, and threaten me with enormous woes? Is not the failure to love you woe enough in itself? Alas for me! Through your own merciful dealings with me, O Lord my God, tell me what you are to me. Say to my soul, *I am your salvation.*²² Say it so that I can hear it. My heart is listening, Lord; open the ears of my heart and say to my soul, *I am your salvation*. Let me run toward this voice and seize hold of you. Do not hide your face from me;²³ let me die so that I may see it, for not to see it would be death to me indeed.²⁴

6. The house of my soul is too small for you to enter: make it more spacious by your coming. It lies in ruins: rebuild it. Some things are to be found there which will offend your gaze; I confess this to be so and know it well. But who will clean my house? To whom but yourself can I cry, *Cleanse me of my hidden sins, O Lord, and for those incurred through others pardon your servant?*²⁵ I believe, and so I will speak.²⁶ You know everything, Lord.²⁷ Have I not laid my own transgressions bare before you to my own condemnation, my God, and have you not forgiven the wickedness of my heart?²⁸ I do not argue my case against you,²⁹ for you are truth itself; nor do I wish to deceive myself, lest my iniquity be caught in its own lies.³⁰ No, I do not argue the case with you, because *if you, Lord, keep the score of our iniquities, then who, Lord, can bear it?*³¹

21. See Jer 44:9.

22. Ps 34(35):3.

23. See Dt 32:20.

24. See Ex 33:23.

25. Ps 18(19):13.

26. See Ps 115(116):10; 2 Cor 4:13.

27. See Jn 21:17.

28. See Ps 31(32):5.

29. See Jb 9:2-3.

30. See Ps 26(27):12.

31. Ps 129(130):3.

Infancy

6, 7. Yet allow me to speak, though I am but dust and ashes,³² allow me to speak in your merciful presence, for it is to your mercy that I address myself, not to some man who would mock me. Perhaps you too are laughing at me,³³ but still you will turn mercifully toward me;³⁴ for what is it that I am trying to say, Lord, except that I do not know whence I came into this life that is but a dying, or rather, this dying state that leads to life? I do not know where I came from.³⁵ But this I know, that I was welcomed by the tender care your mercy provided for me, for so I have been told by the parents who gave me life according to the flesh, those parents through whose begetting and bearing you formed me within time, although I do not remember it myself. The comforts of human milk were waiting for me, but my mother and my nurses did not fill their own breasts; rather you gave me an infant's nourishment through them in accordance with your plan, from the riches deeply hidden in creation. You restrained me from craving more than you provided, and inspired in those who nurtured me the will to give me what you were giving them, for their love for me was patterned on your law,³⁶ and so they wanted to pass on to me the overflowing gift they received from you. It was a bounty for them, and a bounty for me from them; or, rather, not from them but only through them, for in truth all good things are from you, O God. Everything I need for health and salvation flows from my God. This I learned later as you cried the truth aloud to me through all you give me, both within and without. At that time I knew only how to suck and be deliciously comforted, and how to cry when anything hurt my body, but no more.

8. After this I began to smile, at first only in my sleep and then when I was awake.³⁷ So I have been told, and I believe it on the strength of what we see other babies doing, for I do not remember doing it myself. Little by little I began to notice where I was, and I would try to make my wishes

32. See Gn 18:27; Jb 42:6.

33. See Pss 2:4; 36(37):13; Wis 4:18. Augustine is markedly sensitive to the mockery. Elsewhere he speaks of his own mocking attitude in earlier days (for example, III,10,18; IV,4,8), and regards the mocking spirit that delights in the discomfiture of others as typical of gratuitous evil-doing; see III,8,16.

34. See Jér 12:15.

35. All his life Augustine remained agnostic about the origin of the human soul.

36. Human love derived from and conformable to divine love, a very Augustinian idea.

37. Possibly an allusion to Virgil, *Eclogues* IV,60. It was common in ancient wisdom to think of man as the only animal that could laugh: *animal cachinnabile*.

known to those who might satisfy them; but I was frustrated in this, because my desires were inside me, while other people were outside and could by no effort of understanding enter my mind. So I tossed about and screamed, sending signals meant to indicate what I wanted, those few signs that were the best I could manage, though they did not really express my desires. Often I did not get my way, either because people did not understand or because what I demanded might have harmed me, and then I would throw a tantrum because my elders were not subject to me, nor free people willing to be my slaves; so I would take revenge on them by bursting into tears.³⁸ I have learned that babies behave like this from those I have been able to watch, and they without knowing it have taught me more surely what I was like myself than did my nurses who knew me well.

9. My infancy has been so long dead now, whereas I am alive. But you, O Lord, are ever living and in you nothing dies, for you exist before the dawn of the ages, before anything that can be called "before"; you are God and Lord of everything that you have created. In you stand firm the causes of all unstable things; in you the unchangeable origins of all changeable things abide; in you live the eternal ideas of all irrational and transient creatures. Tell me, I beg you, tell your miserable suppliant, O merciful God, whether my infancy was itself the sequel to some earlier age, now dead and gone. Was there nothing before it, except the life I lived in my mother's womb? Some information about that has been given me, and I have myself seen pregnant women. But then, my God, my sweetness, what came before that? Was I somewhere else? Was I even someone? I have nobody to tell me: neither father nor mother could enlighten me, nor the experience of others, nor any memory of my own. Are you laughing at me for asking you these questions,³⁹ and are you perhaps commanding me to praise you and confess to you simply about what I do know?

10. Confess to you I will, Lord of heaven and earth,⁴⁰ and praise you for my earliest days and my infancy, which I do not remember. You allow a person to infer by observing others what his own beginnings were like; we can learn much about ourselves even from the reports of womenfolk. Already I had existence and life, and as my unspeaking stage drew to a

38. Throughout these paragraphs Augustine is continually conscious of the literal meaning of *in-fans*, one who is unable to speak.

39. See Pss 2:4; 36(37):13; Wis 4:18.

40. See Mt 11:25.

close I began to look for signs whereby I might communicate my ideas to others. Where could a living creature like this have come from, if not from you, Lord? Are any of us skillful enough to fashion ourselves? Could there be some channel hollowed out from some other source through which existence and life might flow to us, apart from yourself, Lord, who create us? Could we derive existence and life from anywhere other than you, in whom to be and to live are not two different realities, since supreme being and supreme life are one and the same? You are supreme and you do not change,⁴¹ and in you there is no "today" that passes. Yet in you our "today" does pass, inasmuch as all things exist in you, and would have no means even of passing away if you did not contain them. Because your years do not fail,⁴² your years are one "Today." How many of our days and our ancestors' days have come and gone in this "Today" of yours, have received from it their manner of being and have existed after their fashion, and how many others will likewise receive theirs, and exist in their own way? Yet you are the selfsame: all our tomorrows and beyond, all our yesterdays and further back, you will make in your Today, you have made in your Today.

What does it matter to me, if someone does not understand this? Let such a person rejoice even to ask the question, "What does this mean?" Yes, let him rejoice in that, and choose to find by not finding rather than by finding fail to find you.

7. 11. O God, hear me. Alas for the sins of humankind! A human it is who here bewails them, and you treat him mercifully because you made him, though the sin that is in him is not of your making. Who is there to remind me of the sin of my infancy (for sin there was: no one is free from sin in your sight, not even an infant whose span of earthly life is but a single day);⁴³ who can remind me of it? Some little mite who is a tiny child now, in whom I might observe conduct I do not remember in myself? What then was my sin at that age? Was it perhaps that I cried so greedily for those breasts? Certainly if I behaved like that now, greedy not for breasts, of course, but for food suitable to my age, I should provoke derision and be very properly rebuked. My behavior then was equally deserving of rebuke, but since I would not have been able to understand anyone who

41. See Mal 3:6.

42. See Ps 101:28(102:27); Heb 1:12.

43. See Jb 14:4-5.

scolded me, neither custom nor common sense allowed any rebuke to be given. After all, we eradicate these habits and throw them off as we grow up. Yes, but I have never seen any sensible person throw away good things when clearing out, so can we suppose that even in an infant such actions were good—the actions of a child who begs tearfully for objects that would harm him if given, gets into a tantrum when free persons, older persons and his parents, will not comply with his whims, and tries to hurt many people who know better by hitting out at them as hard as his strength allows, simply because they will not immediately fall in with his wishes or obey his commands, commands which would damage him if they were carried out?

The only innocent feature in babies is the weakness of their frames; the minds of infants are far from innocent. I have watched and experienced for myself the jealousy of a small child: he could not even speak, yet he glared with livid fury at his fellow-nursling. Everyone has seen this. Mothers and nurses claim to have some means of their own to charm away such behavior.⁴⁴ Is this to be regarded as innocence, this refusal to tolerate a rival for a richly abundant fountain of milk, at a time when the other child stands in greatest need of it and depends for its very life on this food alone? Behavior of this kind is cheerfully condoned, however, not because it is trivial or of small account, but because everyone knows that it will fade away as the baby grows up. This is clear from the fact that those same actions are by no means calmly tolerated if detected in anyone of more mature years.

12. Your will is that I should praise you, O Lord my God, who gave life and a body to that infant; you will me to praise you who equipped him with faculties, built up his limbs, and adorned him with a distinctive shape, as we can see. You implanted in him all the urges proper to a living creature to ensure his coherence and safety; and now you command me to praise you for those gifts, and to confess to you and sing to your name, O Most High,⁴⁵ because you are God, almighty and good, and would be so even if you had wrought no other works than these, since none but yourself, the only God, can bring them into existence. From you derives all manner of

44. Possibly a reference to some pagan custom, or perhaps only to the device of distracting the child's attention.

45. See Ps 91:2(92:1).

being, O God most beautiful, who endow all things with their beautiful form and by your governance direct them in their due order.⁴⁶

But it irks me, Lord, to link that phase of my existence with my present life, the life I live now in this world; I do not remember passing through it, I have to rely on the reports of others concerning it, and I can only infer from my observation of other infants that I went through it too, though certainly this inference is well founded. As far as the dark blank in my memory is concerned, that period of infancy is on a par with the time I spent in my mother's womb. And if I was even conceived in iniquity, and with sin my mother nourished me in her womb,⁴⁷ where, I beg of you, my God, where was I, your servant, ever innocent? Where, Lord, and when?

So I will leave that period aside. What does it matter to me now, since it has vanished without trace from my memory?

Learning to speak

8, 13. Did I make my way from that infant stage into boyhood? Or should I rather say that boyhood caught up with me and took over from infancy? Yet infancy did not depart, so what happened to it? It did not stay with me, for I was no longer an infant who lacked the faculty of speech,⁴⁸ but a boy who could talk. I remember this, and later I turned my attention to the way in which I had learned to speak. It was not that older people taught me by offering me words by way of formal instruction, as was the case soon afterward with reading. No, I taught myself, using the mind you gave me, O my God, because I was unable to express the thoughts of my heart by cries and inarticulate sounds and gestures in such a way as to gain what I wanted or make my entire meaning clear to everyone as I wished; so I grasped at words with my memory;⁴⁹ when people called an object by some name, and while saying the word pointed to that thing, I watched and

46. *A quo est omnis modus, formosissime, qui formas omnia et lege tua ordinas omnia*, an invocation of the Trinity. Triadic patterns occur frequently in Augustine, though the vocabulary varies. The allusion is sometimes directly to the persons of the Trinity, at other times to aspects of the created world, especially human nature, which reflect the triune Creator. Here *modus* suggests the initial creation of as yet unformed matter; *forma* the principle of differentiation which gives to each thing its distinctive identity; *ordo* the animating, dynamic force of interrelatedness and love.

47. See Ps 50:7(51:5).

48. The rare form *farer* links this verb with the literal meaning of *infans*.

49. *Prensabam memoria*: variant readings for *prensabam* include *pensabam* ("I weighed in my memory"), and *praesonabam* ("I practiced the sounds in my mind beforehand"). But textual criticism favors the rare *prensabam*, and this accords with the "grasping" character of

remembered that they used that sound when they wanted to indicate that thing. Their intention was clear, for they used bodily gestures, those natural words which are common to all races, such as facial expressions or glances of the eyes or movements of other parts of the body, or a tone of voice that suggested some particular attitude to things they sought and wished to hold on to, or rejected and shunned altogether.

In this way I gradually built up a collection of words, observing them as they were used in their proper places in different sentences and hearing them frequently. I came to understand which things they signified, and by schooling my own mouth to utter them I declared my wishes by using the same signs. Thus I learned to express my needs to the people among whom I lived, and they made their wishes known to me; and I waded deeper into the stormy world of human life, although I was still subject to the authority of my parents and the guidance of my elders.

Augustine goes to school

9, 14. Ah, God, my God, what wretchedness I suffered⁵⁰ in that world, and how I was trifled with! The program for right living presented to me as a boy was that I must obey my mentors, so that I might get on in this world and excel in the skills of the tongue, skills which lead to high repute and deceitful riches. To this end I was sent to school to learn my letters, though I, poor wretch, could see no point in them. All the same, I would be beaten whenever I was lazy about learning. This punishment was taken for granted by grown-up people and many a pupil had undergone it before we did, laying down those rough roadways along which we were now being driven, as we bore our part in the heavy labor and pain allotted to the sons of Adam.⁵¹

We did, however, meet at school some people who prayed to you, Lord, and we learned from them, imagining you as best we could in the guise of some great personage who, while not evident to our senses, was yet able to hear and help us. So it came about that even then in boyhood I began to

Augustine's conduct at this stage. As he clutched greedily at food and other objects, so he now grabs at words.

50. See Terence, *Adelphoe* 867.

51. See Gn 3:16; Sir 40:1.

pray to you, my aid and refuge.⁵² By calling upon you I untied the knots of my tongue and begged you, in my little-boy way but with no little earnestness, not to let me be beaten at school. You did not hear my prayer, lest by hearing it you might have consigned me to a fool's fate; so my stripes were laughed at by my elders and even my parents, who would not have wished anything bad to happen to me. But bad it was, and very dreadful for me.

15. Is it possible, Lord, that there exists anyone so courageous, so united to you by intense love, that he could make light of rack, hooks and similar torments, from which other people the world over pray to you to be delivered? Is there any such person who could rise above them through devout union with you, rather than out of mere clodish insensibility that counterfeits courage? But if this person loved others who are terrified of such tortures, could he still make light of them, as did our parents, who laughed at the torments we boys suffered? We were just as terrified of punishment as other people of torture, and our prayers to you were no whit less heartfelt as we begged that we might escape.

All the same, we were blameworthy, because we were less assiduous in reading, writing and concentrating on our studies than was expected of us. It was not that we lacked intelligence or ability, Lord, for you had endowed us with these in a measure appropriate to our age; it was simply that we loved to play, and we were punished by adults who nonetheless did the same themselves. But whereas the frivolous pursuits of grown-up people are called "business," children are punished for behaving in the same fashion, and no one is sorry for either the children or the adults; so are we to assume that any sound judge of the matter would think it right for me to be beaten because I played ball as a boy, and was hindered by my game from more rapid progress in studies which would only equip me to play an uglier game later?⁵³ Moreover, was the master who flogged me any better himself? If he had been worsted by a fellow-scholar in some pedantic dispute, would he not have been racked by even more bitter jealousy than I was when my opponent in a game of ball got the better of me?

10, 16. O Lord God, you are the disposer and creator of everything in nature, but of our sins the disposer only; and I did sin at that time, Lord my

52. See Pss 93(94):22; 17:3(18:2).

53. *Deformius luderem*: see note on I,7,12. "Deformed" persons or activities are those which fail to reflect the "form" or beauty instilled into them by the second person of the Trinity. Compare Augustine's lament in X,27,38.

God, by disobeying the instructions of my parents and teachers, for I was later able to make good use of the lessons my relatives wanted me to learn, whatever may have been their intention in so directing me. I sinned because I disobeyed them not in order to choose something more worthwhile, but simply because I loved games. I hankered to win myself glory in our contests, and to have my ears tickled by tall stories which only made them itch more hotly;⁵⁴ and all the while that same curiosity more and more inflamed my eyes with lust for the public shows which are the games of grown-ups.⁵⁵ The people who provide these entertainments enjoy such celebrity and public esteem that nearly all of them hope their children will follow their example; and yet they are quite prepared to see those children beaten for watching similar shows to the detriment of their study, study which, as their parents hope, will bring them to a position in which they in turn will provide the shows!

Look with mercy on these follies, Lord, and set us free who already call upon you. Set free those also who do not yet call upon you, so that they may invoke you and you may give them freedom.

His baptism is deferred

11, 17. While still a boy I had heard about the eternal life promised to us through the humility of our Lord and God, who stooped even to our pride; and I was regularly signed with the cross and given his salt even from the womb of my mother, who firmly trusted in you.⁵⁶ You saw, Lord, how one day in my boyhood I was suddenly seized by stomach pains and, as my fever mounted, came near to death. You saw, my God, because even then you were guarding me, with what distress and what faith I earnestly

54. See 1 Tim 4:3-4.

55. The triad of vices to which Augustine here confesses seems to correspond to the *sin of the world* in 1 Jn 2:16. He will develop the thought more fully in X,30,41, but the pattern is already here in his boyhood faults: *amore ludendi* is an early manifestation of the *lust of the flesh*, *superbas victorias of the pride of life*, and *curiositate of the lust of the eyes*.

56. That is, he was initiated into the catechumenate. Although this sentence indicates an awareness of the elements of Christian belief (incarnation and promise of eternal life), it appears that his initiation was not followed by any systematic Christian instruction. The imperfect tenses *signabar ... condiebar* probably suggest a rite performed not only on admission to the catechumenate but at regular intervals.

begged to be baptized into your Christ, who is my God and my Lord;⁵⁷ you saw how I pleaded with my loving kindly mother and with the mother of us all, your Church. She who had given me life according to the flesh was very anxious, because in her pure heart, through her faith in you and with a love still more tender, she was bringing my eternal salvation to birth. She would have hastened to ensure that I was initiated into the saving sacraments and washed clean by confessing you, Lord Jesus, for the forgiveness of my sins, had I not rapidly recovered.

My cleansing was therefore deferred on the pretext that if I lived I would inevitably soil myself again, for it was held that the guilt of sinful defilement incurred after the laver of baptism⁵⁸ was graver and more perilous. I was already a believer, as were my mother and all the household, with the sole exception of my father. He, however, did not overrule the influence my mother's piety exercised over me, by making any attempt to stop me believing in Christ, in whom he did not at that time believe himself. My mother did all she could to see that you, my God, should be more truly my father than he was, and in this endeavor you helped her to win the argument against a husband to whom she, though a better person, was ordinarily subject, for in taking this course she was in fact subjecting herself to you, who so commanded her.

18. My God, I beg you to tell me—for I would very much like to know, if it is your will—to what purpose my baptism was postponed, and whether it was for my good that the restraints against sinning were in some degree slackened for me; it is true, is it not, that they were slackened? Why is it that we still hear nowadays people saying on all sides of another person, "Let him be, let him do as he likes, he is not baptized yet"? Where bodily health is at stake we do not say, "Let him be, let him go on injuring himself, he is not cured yet." How much better it would have been if I had been healed at once, and if everything had been done by my own efforts and those of my family to ensure that the good health my soul had received should be kept safe in the care of you who had given it. Yes, how much better it would have been! But many towering waves of temptation seemed to be looming in the period beyond boyhood. My mother already

57. See Jn 20:28.

58. *Lavacrum*: see Ti 3:5; Sg 6:5. The word became common among Christian writers as a synonym for baptism. The practice of deferring baptism until the recipient was on his deathbed was not unusual; in later life as a bishop Augustine opposed it. See his remarks in the following paragraph.

anticipated them and thought it better to risk in them the clay from which I would later be molded than the new-formed man himself.⁵⁹

12, 19. Yet even during that time of my boyhood, when it was supposed that I was safer than I would be in adolescence, I was not fond of study, and hated being driven to it. Driven I was, though, and that did me good, though my own attitude was far from good, because I learned only under compulsion, and no one is doing right who acts unwillingly, even if what he does is good in itself. The people who forced me on were not acting well either, but good accrued to me all the same from you, my God. They did not foresee to what use I would put the lessons they made me learn: they thought only of sating man's insatiable appetite for a poverty tricked out as wealth and a fame that is but infamy. But you, who have even kept count of our hairs,⁶⁰ turned to my profit the misguided views of those who stood over me and made me learn, just as you also turned to my profit my own perverse unwillingness to learn by using it to punish me, for I certainly deserved punishment, being a great sinner for such a tiny boy. In this way you turned to my good the actions of those who were doing no good, and gave me my just deserts by means of my sin itself. Matters are so arranged at your command that every disordered soul is its own punishment.

Latin and Greek studies

13, 20. Even to this day I have been unable to make up my mind why I hated the Greek that was dinned into me in early boyhood.⁶¹ Latin studies, on the contrary, I loved, not the elementary kind under my first teachers, but the lessons taught by masters of literature;⁶² for the early lessons in reading, writing and arithmetic had been no less burdensome and boring to me than all the elements of Greek. What other reason could there be for this than the sinful, inane pride in my life, flesh as I was, a passing breath

59. The thought emerges from Gn 1:2 and 1:26-27. "Clay" represents unformed matter. *Effigies* is used by Augustine elsewhere of Christ, that is, God in human form. Baptism stamps this form of Christ upon us.

60. See Mt 10:30.

61. The real extent of Augustine's knowledge of Greek is controverted. It seems that he may have had a rudimentary working knowledge of the language throughout most of his life, and have improved it at a date later than the writing of *The Confessions*. He rubbed shoulders with Greek-speaking clergy, and Bishop Valerius, under whom Augustine was a presbyter, was certainly familiar with Greek.

62. "Grammarians," but the term had a wider connotation than our modern word, more like "teachers in secondary schools."

that comes not again?⁶³ Those early lessons in literacy were unquestionably more profitable because more dependable; by means of them I was gradually being given a power which became mine and still remains with me: the power to read any piece of writing I come across and to write anything I have a mind to myself. Far more useful, then, were those studies than others in which I was forced to memorize the wanderings of some fellow called Aeneas, while forgetting my own waywardness, and to weep over Dido, who killed herself for love, when all the while in my intense misery I put up with myself with never a tear, as I died away from you, O God, who are my life.

21. What indeed is more pitiful than a piteous person who has no pity for himself? I could weep over the death Dido brought upon herself out of love for Aeneas, yet I shed no tears over the death I brought upon myself by not loving you. O God, you are the light of my heart, bread for the inward mouth of my soul,⁶⁴ the virtue wedded to my mind and the innermost recesses of my thought; yet I did not love you, and breaking my troth I strayed away from you.⁶⁵ Even in this troth-breaking the approval of people all around me rang in my ears: "Fine! Well done."⁶⁶ To pander to this world is to fornicate against you, but so loudly do they shout "Well done!" that one feels ashamed to fall short of their expectations. For these things I did not weep, yet I wept for Dido, "slain as she sought her last end by the sword,"⁶⁷ while I myself was abandoning you to seek the last dregs of your creation; dust I was, and unto dust returning.⁶⁸ If forbidden to read those tales, I was saddened at being prevented from reading what would sadden me. How insane it is to regard these studies as more civilized and rewarding than the elementary lessons in which I learned to read and write!

22. But now let my God cry more loudly in my soul, so that your truth may tell me, "No, that is not the case; it is not true. The primary teaching is better in every respect." I am undoubtedly more ready today to forget the

63. See Ps 77(78):39.

64. "Light" and "bread" are both images used by Christ of himself in the gospel of John.

65. See Ps 72(73):27. The background to this metaphor is the bridal relationship established by God with Israel in the covenant and consummated in Christ's marriage to the Church. Hence serious sin, and especially resort to false gods, was called "fornication" or "adultery" in the prophetic tradition, and Augustine's use of the psalmist's words in the present context need not refer to sexual sin.

66. See Pss 34(35):21; 39:16(40):15; 69:4(70:3).

67. See Virgil, *Aeneid* VI, 6 456-457.

68. See Gn 3:19.

wanderings of Aeneas and so forth than how to write or read. Curtains may well hang at the entrance to schools of literature, but they serve less to signal the prestige of elite instruction than to conceal error.⁶⁹ Let not those buyers and sellers of literary studies shout me down, my God, as I confess to you according to my soul's need, and acquiesce as you chide me for those evil ways of mine and bring me to love your good ways; let them not shout me down, for I fear them no longer. If I put to them the question whether the poet spoke truly when he affirmed that Aeneas once came to Carthage, the uneducated will say they do not know, while the more scholarly will admit that it is untrue. If, on the other hand, I ask how to spell the name "Aeneas," everyone who has studied the subject will give me a correct answer in accordance with the settled convention which people have made among themselves in fixing those signs. If I then go further and ask which would be a graver handicap in this life, to forget how to read and write, or to forget those poetic fantasies, can one doubt what answer would be given by anyone in his right mind?

15. Sin I did, then, in boyhood, by preferring those frivolous tales to much more useful attainments, or rather by loving the one and loathing the other. Already the jingle, "One and one make two, two and two make four," was hateful to me, whereas a wooden horse full of armed men, Troy afire, and the shade of Creusa⁷⁰—these were a spectacle on which I delighted to gaze, and as empty as they were entertaining.

14. 23. Why was it, then, that I hated studying Greek literature, which had similar songs to sing? Homer was just as skilled at weaving stories, and he too was empty in a thoroughly entertaining way, yet as a boy I found him distasteful. I expect Virgil is equally distasteful to Greek boys, when they are forced to study him as I was Homer. It was so difficult; and the difficulty of thoroughly mastering a foreign language seemed to sprinkle bitterness over those fabulous narratives for all their Greek sweetness, because I knew none of the words, and the threat of savage, terrifying punishments was used to make me learn them. Time was, in my infancy, when I had known no Latin words either, but those I had learned

69. These schools were sometimes open-sided buildings, divided from the street only by columns, between which curtains were hung. Augustine refers to them in Sermon 51,4,5: "The higher the honor in which a master is held, the more curtains hang at his doorway. They are there to ensure privacy, but lifted to admit anyone who will do him honor." He may be sarcastically alluding to curtains which screened shrines, creating an atmosphere of mystery.

70. See Virgil, *Aeneid* II,772.

by paying attention, without any fear or pain at all, amid the cuddles of my nurses, and teasing, and playful, happy laughter. So I learned then without the painful pressure of people pestering me, because my own heart prompted me to bring forth its ideas, as it never could have done had I not learned words. Only I learned in infancy not from teachers but from speakers, into whose ears I in my turn was able to give utterance to what I had conceived in my mind. It is evident that the free play of curiosity is a more powerful spur to learning these things than is fear-ridden coercion; yet in accordance with your laws, O God, coercion checks the free play of curiosity. By your laws it constrains us, from the beatings meted out by our teachers to the ordeals of the martyrs, for in accord with those laws it prescribes for us bitter draughts of salutary discipline to recall us from the venomous pleasure which led us away from you.

15. 24. Hear my prayer, Lord.⁷¹ Let not my soul faint under your discipline, nor let me weary as I confess before you those acts of mercy⁷² by which you plucked me from all my evil ways.⁷³ I long for you to grow sweeter to me than all those allurements I was pursuing. You have enabled me to love you with all my strength and with passionate yearning grasp your hand, so that you may rescue me from every temptation until my life's end.⁷⁴ See, Lord, you are my king and my God;⁷⁵ let every useful thing I learned as a boy be devoted now to your service; let whatever I speak, write, read or count serve you, for even as I was learning such vanities you were schooling me, and you have forgiven the sins of self-indulgence I committed in those frivolous studies. Through them I acquired a great many useful words, though admittedly the same words can be learned just as well from texts which are by no means frivolous, and would make a safer path for children to tread.

16. 25. Woe, woe to you, you flood of human custom! Who can keep his footing against you? Will you never run dry? How long will you toss the children of Eve into a vast, terrifying sea, which even those afloat on the saving wood can scarcely cross?⁷⁶ Did you not give me a story to read in which Jupiter is both the Thunderer and an adulterer? He could not

71. See Ps 60:2(61:1).

72. See Ps 106(107), *passim*.

73. See 2 Kgs 17:13.

74. See 1 Cor 1:8.

75. See Pss 5:3(2);43:5(44:4).

76. Combined imagery: (1) the tree of life, the cross; (2) Noah's ark, referred to in Wis 14:7 as "the wood whereby righteousness was established."

possibly be both; yet so he was represented, to the end that his real adultery might seem to establish itself as deserving of imitation because a faked thunder-clap acted as go-between. Who among our hooded masters of oratory⁷⁷ give sober consideration to the cry of one who was of the same clay as themselves, "Homer invented these stories and attributed human actions to the gods, but I wish he had rather provided us with examples of divine behavior"?⁷⁸ It would be truer to say that Homer did indeed make up these tales, and thereby seemed to invest the disgraceful deeds of human beings with an aura of divinity, so that depraved actions should be reckoned depraved no longer, since anyone who behaved so could pretend to be imitating not abandoned humans but the gods above.

26. O hellish river, human children clutching their fees are still pitched into you to learn about these exploits, and general interest is aroused when education is publicly touted in the forum, in view of the law which decrees that a state salary be paid to teachers over and above the pupils' fees. You clash your rocks and set up a great din: "This is the place to acquire literacy; here you will develop the eloquence essential to persuasion and argument." Really? Could we not have learned those useful words elsewhere, words like "shower," "golden," "lap," "trick," "heavenly temples," if Terence had not presented to us a young scoundrel who took Jupiter as a model for his own fornication? This young man looks at a mural painting which shows how Jupiter tricked a woman by sending a golden shower into Danae's lap.⁷⁹ Watch the dissolute youth making use of heavenly instruction to work up his lust! "What a god!" he exclaims, "a god who makes the temples of heaven ring with his thunder!" Well, a poor little fellow like me can't do that, but I have imitated him in the other thing, and what fun it was!⁸⁰

It is simply not true that such words are more conveniently learned from obscene stories of this type, though it is all too true that under the influence of the words obscene deeds are the more boldly committed. I am blaming

77. The *paenula* or hood was originally a hooded cloak worn in the rain. Tacitus mentions orators who wore it even when pleading before a judge, implying that this was a scruffy but common practice (*Dialogus de oratoribus* 39). It is unclear whether the *paenula* had become a recognized sign of masters of oratory by Augustine's time.

78. Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* I,26.65.

79. *Euruchus* 584-591.

80. See ibid. 585, 589-590. The four standard Latin authors read by schoolboys in Augustine's day were Virgil, Cicero, Terence, and Sallust.

not the words, which are finely-wrought, precious vessels,⁸¹ but the wine of error mixed for us in them by teachers who are drunk themselves. If we as boys refused to drink it we were caned, and no appeal to a sober judge was open to us. Wretch that I was, I learned these things eagerly and took pleasure in them; and so I was accounted a boy of high promise. But in your presence, my God, I can remember it now and be at peace.

17. 27. Allow me to say something, my God, about the intelligence which was your gift to me,⁸² and the crazy employments in which I frittered it away. An exercise was set for me which was fraught with worrying implications, for I hoped to win praise and honor if I succeeded, but if not, I ran the risk of being caned. I was required to produce a speech made by Juno expressing her anger and grief at being unable to repulse the Trojan king from Italy,⁸³ but in words which I had never heard Juno use. We were obliged to follow the errant footsteps⁸⁴ of poetic fantasies and to express in prose what the poet had said in verse. That boy was adjudged the best speaker who most convincingly suggested emotions of anger and grief and clothed them in apt words, as befitted the dignity of the person represented. What did it profit me, O God, my true life,⁸⁵ that my speech was acclaimed above those of my many peers and fellow-students? Was it not all smoke and wind? Was there no other material on which I could have exercised my intelligence and my tongue? Yes, there was: your praise, O Lord; your praise in the words of the scriptures would have supported the drooping vine of my soul, and then it would not have yielded a crop of worthless fruit for the birds to carry off. Sacrifice can be offered to those birds of prey, the rebel angels, in more ways than one.

18. 28. Small wonder, then, that I was swept off helplessly after profitless things and borne away from you, my God. The models proposed to me for imitation were people who would have been caught out and covered with confusion if they had related any of their doings—deeds not wrong in themselves—in a barbaric accent or with grammatical blunders, whereas to relate licentious deeds in correct and well-turned phrases, in ample and elegant style, would have won them praise and honor. You see this, Lord,

81. See Prv 20:15.

82. Augustine opened Book I with a prayer asking God to enable him to speak; he introduces its concluding section similarly.

83. See Virgil, *Aeneid* I,38.

84. As in I,13.20.22, Augustine plays on the double meaning of *erro*, to wander (geographically) or to go astray.

85. See Jn 11:25; 14:6.

but you are very patient and look on silently; you are exceedingly merciful and worthy of our trust.⁸⁶ Will you always remain silent?⁸⁷ From this vast, deep sea you are even now drawing out to safety⁸⁸ a soul that seeks you and thirsts to enjoy you,⁸⁹ one whose heart pleads with you, *I have sought your face, O Lord, your face will I seek,*⁹⁰ for at that time I was far away from your countenance in darkness of spirit. Not with our feet or by traversing great distances do we journey away from you or find our way back. That younger son of yours in the gospel⁹¹ did not hire horses or carriages, nor did he board ships, nor take wing in any visible sense nor put one foot before the other when he journeyed to that far country where he could squander at will the wealth you, his gentle father, had given him at his departure. Gentle you were then, but gentler still with him when he returned in his need. No, to be estranged in a spirit of lust, and lost in its darkness, that is what it means to be far away from your face.⁹²

29. Look upon all this, O Lord God and, as you look, patiently consider how carefully human beings observe those orthographic conventions and syllabic quantities which they have received from earlier orators, while neglecting the eternal rules directed to unending salvation which they have received from you. A speaker who wishes to maintain and teach those long-standing conventions will give greater offense to his fellow-men by pronouncing the word "human" without sounding the "h," in defiance of grammatical discipline, than if he, human as he is, flouts your commands by hating a fellow-human. Does he suppose that another human being who is his enemy can do him more harm than does the very hatred with which he regards that other person, or that anyone can do more serious damage to another by hostile behavior than he does to his own soul by harboring hostile intent? Knowledge of letters lies less deep in us than the law written in our conscience⁹³ which forbids us to do to another what we would not have done to ourselves.⁹⁴

86. See Pss 102(103):8; 85(86):15.

87. See Is 42:14.

88. See Ps 85(86):13.

89. See Pss 41:3(42:2); 62:2(63:1).

90. Ps 26(27):8.

91. See Lk 15:32.

92. In these last lines Augustine combines imagery from the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-32) with a remembered passage from Plotinus (*Enneads* I,6.8.16-27).

93. See Rom 2:15.

94. See Tb 4:16; Mt 7:12; Lk 6:31.

How hidden you are, dwelling on high⁹⁵ in your silence, great and only God, who by your unfaltering law spread the punishment of blindness over unlawful human lusts! A man in persistent search of fame pleads before a merely human judge, with a crowd of other humans standing round, and accuses his adversary with savage hatred. He takes the utmost care that no slip of the tongue betrays him into saying, "Them fellows . . . , " while caring not a whit that by his rage he is about to remove a fellow-human from human society.

Childish sins

19, 30. Such were the moral standards of the world at whose threshold I lay, a wretched boy; this was the arena in which I was to struggle. It made me more wary of committing some barbarism in speech than of being jealous of others who did not commit it when I did. I tell you this, my God, and confess to you those efforts for which I was praised; for at that time I believed that living a good life consisted in winning the favor of those who commended me. I failed to recognize the whirlpool of disgraceful conduct into which I had been flung, out of your sight.⁹⁶ What could have been fouler in your eyes at that time than myself? I was earning the disapproval even of those same people by the countless lies with which I deceived the slave who took me to school, my teachers and my parents, and all because of my love for play and the absurd anxiety with which I craved to gawk at worthless shows and imitate what I watched.

I stole from my parents' larder too, and their table, either out of gluttony or to get something with which I could bribe other boys to let me join in their games, for they exacted a price even though they enjoyed our play as much as I did. In those games I would often seek to dominate by fraudulent means, because I was myself dominated by a vain urge to excel.⁹⁷ And what was it that I was so unwilling to excuse, what did I so fiercely condemn if I detected it in others, but the very cheating I practiced myself? If I was caught out and accused of cheating I was more apt to lose my temper than to admit it. Is this boyhood innocence? No, Lord, it is not; hear

95. See Is 33:5.

96. See Ps 30:23(31:22).

97. Another instance of the threefold temptation: curiosity about seeing, gluttony, vanity. See note on I,10,16.

me, dear God, it is not. These same sins grow worse as we grow older: first it is offenses against pedagogues and teachers, or cheating over nuts and balls and sparrows; then later it is crimes against prefects and kings, and fraud in gold and estates and slaves, just as a schoolboy's canings are succeeded by heavier punishments. It was only the small stature of a child that you mentioned with approval as a symbol of humility, O Lord our king, when you declared that *of such is the kingdom of heaven.*⁹⁸

Thanksgiving

20, 31. In spite of all this, O Lord our God, I give thanks to you, the most perfect, most good creator and ruler of the universe, and I would still thank you even if you had not willed me to live beyond boyhood. Even then I existed, I lived and I experienced;⁹⁹ I took good care to keep myself whole and sound and so preserve the trace in me of your profoundly mysterious unity, from which I came. By means of my inner sense¹⁰⁰ I coordinated my sensible impressions, and in my little thoughts about little things I delighted in truth. I was unwilling to be deceived, I had a lively memory, I was being trained in the use of words, I was comforted by friendship, and I shrank from pain, groveling and ignorance.

In a living creature such as this
everything is wonderful and worthy of praise,
but all these things are gifts from my God.
I did not endow myself with them,
but they are good, and together they make me what I am.
He who made me is good, and he is my good too;
rejoicing, I thank him for all those good gifts
which made me what I was, even as a boy.
In this lay my sin,
that not in him was I seeking pleasures, distinctions and truth,

98. Mt 19:14.

99. See note at I,7,12 above on trinitarian allusions. That the present triad, *eram ... vivebam ... sentiebam* is an intentional reference to the Trinity is evident from the next phrase Augustine uses of himself, *vestigium secretissimae unitatis*. He is made in the image of God, Three in One.

100. The "common sense" of Aristotelian and Stoic philosophy which correlates impressions received through the external senses. The "outer man" is for Augustine an image of the "inner man" who can know both God and the self.

but in myself and the rest of his creatures,
and so I fell headlong into pains, confusions and errors.
But I give thanks to you, my sweetness, my honor, my confidence;
to you, my God, I give thanks for your gifts.
Do you preserve them for me.
So will you preserve me too,
and what you have given me will grow and reach perfection,
and I will be with you; because this too is your gift to me
— that I exist.

Book II

Adolescence

Sexual awakening

1. 1. Now I want to call to mind the foul deeds I committed, those sins of the flesh that corrupted my soul,¹ not in order to love them, but to love you, my God. Out of love for loving you I do this, recalling my most wicked ways and thinking over the past with bitterness so that you may grow ever sweeter to me; for you are a sweetness that deceives not, a sweetness blissful and serene.² I will try now to give a coherent account of my disintegrated self, for when I turned away from you, the one God, and pursued a multitude of things, I went to pieces. There was a time in adolescence when I was afire to take my fill of hell. I boldly thrust out rank, luxuriant growth in various furtive love affairs; my beauty wasted away and I rotted in your sight, intent on pleasing myself and winning favor in the eyes of men.

2. 2. What was it that delighted me? Only loving and being loved. But there was no proper restraint, as in the union of mind with mind, where a bright boundary regulates friendship. From the mud of my fleshly desires³ and my erupting puberty belched out murky clouds that obscured and darkened my heart until I could not distinguish the calm light of love from the fog of lust. The two swirled about together and dragged me, young and weak as I was, over the cliffs of my desires, and engulfed me in a whirlpool of sins. Your anger had grown hot at my doings, yet I did not know. I was deafened by that clanking chain of my mortal state which was the punish-

1. The image of God in man is "corrupted" by sin; Book II recounts this process in Augustine's adolescence. It is refashioned by God's saving work, as he confesses at XIII, 34, 49.
2. The sweet Spirit of love is contrasted with the bitterness of his recollected sins, as Augustine embarks on the history of his disordered loves. In the following sentence the contrast between unity and multiplicity is reminiscent of Porphyry.
3. See 1 Jn 2:16.

ment for my soul's pride, and I was wandering away from you, yet you let me go my way. I was flung hither and thither, I poured myself out, frothed and floundered in the tumultuous sea of my fornications; and you were silent.⁴ O my joy, how long I took to find you! At that time you kept silence as I continued to wander far from you and sowed more and more sterile seeds to my own grief, abased by my pride and wearied by my restlessness.

3. Who was there to alleviate my distress? No one took thought to arrange a marriage for me, so that my pursuit of fleeting beauties through most ignoble experiences might be diverted into useful channels. Some bounds might have been set to my pleasures if only the stormy surge of my adolescence had flung me up onto the shore of matrimony. Or again, if I had been unable to find tranquillity in that way, content to use my sexuality to procreate children as your law enjoins,⁵ O Lord (since you propagate the stock of our mortal race by this means, powerfully using your gentle hand to control the thorns which have no place in your paradise,⁶ for your almighty power is never far from us, even when we are far from you), if, as I say, I could not have found peace in marriage, this at all events is certain, that I ought to have listened more attentively to the voice from your clouds⁷ which proclaimed, *Those who marry will have trials in their married life; and I would wish to spare you;*⁸ and again, *It is a good thing for a man not to touch a woman;*⁹ and, *An unmarried man is preoccupied with the affairs of God, and with pleasing God; but a married man is preoccupied with the affairs of the world, and with pleasing his wife.*¹⁰ Yes, I could have listened more attentively to those words, and made myself a eunuch for the kingdom of heaven.¹¹ In that way I might have waited more contentedly for your embrace.

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4. See Is 42:14.
 5. See Gn 1:28.
 6. See Gn 3:18.
 7. Augustine frequently uses clouds as a symbol of the preachers of God's word, who produce the thunder of his threats and the rain that gives life. In the present text the reference is to the scriptural words themselves.
 8. 1 Cor 7:28.
 9. 1 Cor 7:1.
 10. 1 Cor 7:32-33.
 11. See Mt 19:12.

4. But I was far too impetuous, poor wretch, so I went with the flood-tide of my nature and abandoned you. I swept across all your laws,¹² but I did not escape your chastisements, for what mortal can do that? You were ever present to me, mercifully angry, sprinkling very bitter disappointments over all my unlawful pleasures so that I might seek a pleasure free from all disappointment. If only I could have done that, I would have found nothing but yourself, Lord, nothing but you yourself who use pain to make your will known to us,¹³ and strike only to heal,¹⁴ and even kill us lest we die away from you. Where was I, and how far was I exiled from the joys of your house¹⁵ in that sixteenth year of my bodily age, when the frenzy of lust imposed its rule on me, and I wholeheartedly yielded to it? A lust it was licensed by disgraceful human custom, but illicit before your laws. Yet none of my family made any attempt to avert my ruin by arranging a marriage for me; their only concern was that I should learn to excel in rhetoric and persuasive speech.

A year at home

3, 5. In that same year, my sixteenth, my studies were interrupted and I was brought back from Madaura, a nearby city where I had been lodging for instruction in literature and rhetoric. The reason for this was that my father was saving up to send me further afield, to Carthage, though it was his shameless ambition that suggested the plan, not his wealth, for he was no more than a fairly obscure town councillor at Thagaste. But to whom am I telling this story? Not to you, my God; rather in your presence I am relating these events to my own kin, the human race, however few of them may chance upon these writings of mine. And why? So that whoever reads them may reflect with me on the depths from which we must cry to you.¹⁶

12. See Lv 10:11.

13. See Ps 93(94):20. The original meaning of the psalm is different, but the obscurity of the Latin translation led Augustine to take it in the sense that God uses suffering to teach his people.

14. See Hos 6:2.

15. See Lk 15:13.

16. See Ps 129(130):1.

What finds a readier hearing with you than a heart that confesses to you, a life lived from faith?¹⁷

At the time I speak of anyone would have heaped praise upon my father, a man prepared to go beyond his means in spending as much money as was needed to send his son away to study, even in a distant city. No such efforts were made on behalf of the children of many other citizens who were far richer; yet all the while this same father of mine was unconcerned about how I would grow up for you, and cared little that I should be chaste, provided I was intellectually cultivated. It would be truer to say that I was left fallow¹⁸ of your cultivation, O God, who are the only true and good owner of your field, my heart.¹⁹

6. Owing to the state of family finances in this sixteenth year of my life there was an interval of leisure for me, during which, being free from all schooling, I began to spend time in my parents' company. The thorn-bushes of my lust shot up higher than my head, and no hand was there to root them out. Least of all my father's; for when at the baths one day he saw me with unquiet adolescence as my only covering²⁰ and noted my ripening sexuality, he began at once to look forward eagerly to grandchildren, and gleefully announced his discovery to my mother. His glee sprang from that intoxication which has blotted you, our creator, out of this world's memory and led it to love the creature instead,²¹ as it drinks the unseen wine of its perverse inclination and is dragged down to the depths. In my mother's soul, however, you had already begun to build your temple and prepare for your holy indwelling,²² whereas my father was still a catechumen, and a recent one at that. She therefore started up in devout fear and trembling, for she was afraid for me even though I was not yet a Christian. She saw the twisted paths I followed, those paths trodden by people who turn their backs to you, not their faces.²³

17. See Hb 2:4; Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38.

18. A pun on *disertus* (skilled, dexterous) and *desertus* (abandoned, left fallow).

19. See Mt 13:24-30.

20. *Inquieta indutum adulescentia*: the adjective "restless" or "unquiet" is understandable enough in reference to this stage, but is also significant in view of the antithesis of restlessness and repose which pervades *The Confessions*; see I,1,1. It is also possible that the "disquieting" revelations of nakedness echo Gn 3:7. Patricius' delight may suggest that Augustine was their eldest child.

21. See Rom 1:25.

22. See 1 Cor 3:16-17.

23. See Jer 2:27.

Adolescent lust

7. Alas for me! Do I dare to say that you were silent, my God, when I was straying from you? Were you really silent to me at that time? Whose, then, were the words spoken to me by my mother, your faithful follower? Were they not your words, the song you were constantly singing into my ears? None of it sank down to my heart, though, to induce me to act on it. She urged me to keep clear of fornication, and especially not to commit adultery with any man's wife. I remember in my inmost heart the intense earnestness with which she cautioned me against this; but these warnings seemed to me mere woman's talk, which I would have blushed to heed. In truth they came from you, but I failed to realize that, and assumed that you were silent and she alone was talking. By using her you were not silent to me at all; and when I scorned her I was scorning you—I, her son, the son of your handmaid, I your servant!²⁴ But I was quite reckless; I rushed on headlong in such blindness that when I heard other youths of my own age bragging about their immoralities I was ashamed to be less depraved than they. The more disgraceful their deeds, the more credit they claimed; and so I too became as lustful for the plaudits as for the lechery itself. What is more to be reviled than vile debauchery? Afraid of being reviled I grew viler,²⁵ and when I had no indecent acts to admit that could put me on a level with these abandoned youths, I pretended to obscenities I had not committed, lest I might be thought less courageous for being more innocent, and be accounted cheaper for being more chaste.

8. With companions like these I roamed the streets of Babylon²⁶ and wallowed in its filth as though basking amid cinnamon and precious ointments. My invisible enemy trampled on me²⁷ and seduced me in order to fix me still faster in the center of that city, for I was easy enough to seduce. My natural mother had by this time fled from the center of Babylon,²⁸ though she still lingered in its suburbs. She warned me to live chastely, but did not extend her care to restraining within the bounds of conjugal love (if it could not be cut right back to the quick) this behavior of mine, of which

24. See Ps 115(116):16.

25. This and the preceding sentence contain assonances which the translation attempts to suggest: *libebat ... libidine; vituperatione ... vitium; vituperarer ... vitirosior.*

26. Babylon is for Augustine the biblical type of the earthly city; he will develop the theme later in *The City of God*.

27. See Ps 55:2(56:1).

28. See Jer 51:6.

she had heard from her husband, even though she judged it to be corrupt already and likely to be dangerous in the future. Her reluctance to arrange a marriage for me arose from the fear that if I were encumbered with a wife my hope could be dashed—not hope in you for the world to come, to which she held herself, but my hope of academic success. Both my parents were very keen on my making progress in study: my father, because he thought next to nothing about you and only vain things about me; and my mother, because she regarded the customary course of studies as no hindrance, and even a considerable help, toward my gaining you eventually. So, at least, do I interpret their respective attitudes, as I remember them now as best I can.

The restraints placed upon my amusements were also slackened more than strict discipline would have approved, with the result that I strayed into various disreputable amours. Throughout these experiences a dark fog cut me off from your bright truth, my God, and my sin grew sleek on my excesses.²⁹

He robs a pear tree

4. 9. Beyond question, theft is punished by your law, O Lord,³⁰ and by the law written in human hearts,³¹ which not even sin itself can erase; for does any thief tolerate being robbed by another thief, even if he is rich and the other is driven by want? I was under no compulsion of need, unless a lack of moral sense can count as need, and a loathing for justice, and a greedy, full-fed love of sin. Yet I wanted to steal, and steal I did. I already had plenty of what I stole, and of much better quality too, and I had no desire to enjoy it when I resolved to steal it. I simply wanted to enjoy the theft for its own sake, and the sin.

Close to our vineyard there was a pear tree laden with fruit. This fruit was not enticing, either in appearance or in flavor. We nasty lads went there to shake down the fruit and carry it off at dead of night, after prolonging our games out of doors until that late hour according to our abominable custom. We took enormous quantities, not to feast on ourselves but perhaps to throw to the pigs; we did eat a few, but that was

29. See Ps 72(73):7.

30. See Ex 20:15; Dt 5:19.

31. See Rom 2:14-15.

not our motive: we derived pleasure from the deed simply because it was forbidden.³²

Look upon my heart, O God, look upon this heart of mine, on which you took pity in its abysmal depths. Enable my heart to tell you now what it was seeking in this action which made me bad for no reason, in which there was no motive for my malice except malice. The malice was loathsome, and I loved it. I was in love with my own ruin, in love with decay: not with the thing for which I was falling into decay but with decay itself, for I was depraved in soul, and I leapt down from your strong support into destruction, hungering not for some advantage to be gained by the foul deed, but for the foulness of it.

Question of motives

5, 10. The beautiful form of material things attracts our eyes, so we are drawn to gold, silver and the like. We are powerfully influenced by the feel of things agreeable³³ to the touch; and each of our other senses finds some quality that appeals to it individually in the variety of material objects. There is the same appeal in worldly rank, and the possibility it offers of commanding and dominating other people: this too holds its attraction, and often provides an opportunity for settling old scores. We may seek all these things, O Lord, but in seeking them we must not deviate from your law. The life we live here is open to temptation by reason of a certain measure and harmony between its own splendor and all these beautiful things of low degree. Again, the friendship which draws human beings together in a tender bond is sweet to us because out of many minds it forges

32. Augustine's heavy emphasis on this episode has sometimes puzzled readers, who have seen in it no more than a teenager's prank. He depicts it as sin, rebellion against God's law, with no mitigating motive other than lust for the wrongness itself. In view of his habitual preoccupation with the opening chapters of Genesis it is not difficult to see the pear tree episode as a parallel to the fall in Gn 3, which was followed by the awakening of disordered sexual concupiscence in Adam and Eve: here we have a symbolic "fall" in Augustine's life, though his sexual concupiscence is already disordered. The mention of throwing the fruit to pigs evokes the plight of the prodigal son, who is never far from Augustine's mind in these pages (see Lk 15:15-16).

33. *Congruentia*, a suitability, fitness, correspondence, is central to Augustine's idea of beauty.

a unity.³⁴ Sin gains entrance through these and similar good things when we turn to them with immoderate desire, since they are the lowest kind of goods and we thereby turn away from the better and higher: from you yourself, O Lord our God, and your truth and your law. These lowest goods hold delights for us indeed, but no such delights as does my God, who made all things; for in him the just man finds delight, and for upright souls³⁵ he himself is joy.

11. So then, when people look for the reason why some criminal act has been committed, their account is usually reckoned credible only when it is evident that there may have been greed on the malefactor's part to gain possession of goods belonging to someone else—those goods we have called "lowest"—or fear of losing his own; for these good things truly are beautiful and lovely in their own way, even though base and mean in comparison with the higher goods that bring us true happiness. Suppose someone has committed homicide. Why did he do it? Perhaps he was in love with the victim's wife, or coveted his estate, or wanted to steal from him in order to support himself, or feared to be robbed of the like himself by the other man, or had been injured and burned for revenge. Is it likely that he would kill another person without any motive, simply because he enjoyed killing? Who could believe that? Admittedly it is reported of a certain frenzied and outrageously cruel man that "he preferred being evil and cruel with no provocation,"³⁶ but a motive for his crimes was nonetheless declared: he wished to ensure, the historian tells us, that "neither hand nor mind should atrophy from inaction."³⁷ We might further ask, "And what else did he intend?" He meant to use crime for the training of his young conspirators, in order eventually to gain control of the city and win honors, power and riches: thus he would be free from fear of the law and from the difficulties in his circumstances arising from "shortage of money and his guilty record."³⁸ Even Catiline, then, did not love his criminal acts for their own sake, but only the advantages he had in view when committing them.

34. The first hint of the only possible good that, Augustine will eventually admit, played a part in his motives for the theft.

35. See Ps 63:11(64:10).

36. Sallust, *Catilina* 16,3. Augustine will name Catiline at the end of the paragraph.

37. Ibid. 5,5.

38. Ibid. 5,7.

6. 12. How does this apply to me, poor wretch? What did I love in you, O my theft, what did I love in you, the nocturnal crime of my sixteenth year? There was nothing beautiful about you, for you were nothing but a theft. Are you really anything at all, for me to be speaking to you like this?

O good God, creator of all things³⁹ and more beautiful than all of them, those pears we stole did have a certain beauty because they were your creation—yours, O God, who are the highest good and the true good for me. Those pears were beautiful, but they were not what my miserable soul loved. I had plenty of better ones, and I plucked them only for the sake of stealing, for once picked I threw them away. I feasted on the sin, nothing else, and that I relished and enjoyed. Even if some morsel of the pears did enter my mouth, it was only the criminal act that lent it savor. So now, Lord my God, when I ask what it was that gave me pleasure in that theft, I find nothing of fair, seductive form at all. I do not mean simply that it lacked the beauty to be found in justice and prudence, or the beauty of the human mind and intelligence, or that of our senses and bodily life, or the beauty inherent in the stars, so lovely in their appointed places, or in the earth and the sea full of young life born there to replace the things that die. No, I mean more: my theft lacked even the sham, shadowy beauty with which even vice allures us.⁴⁰

13. For in vice there lurks a counterfeit beauty: pride, for instance—even pride apes sublimity, whereas you are the only God, most high above all things. As for ambition, what does it crave but honors and glory, while you are worthy of honor beyond all others, and eternally glorious? The ferocity of powerful men aims to inspire fear; but who is to be feared except the one God? Can anything be snatched from his power or withdrawn from it—when or where or whither or by whom? Flirtatiousness aims to arouse love by its charming wiles, but nothing can hold more charm than your charity, nor could anything be loved to greater profit than your truth, which outshines all else in its luminous beauty. Curiosity poses as pursuit of knowledge, whereas you know everything to a supreme degree. Even ignorance or stupidity masquerades as simplicity and innocence, but nothing that exists is simpler than yourself; and what

39. See 2 Mc 1:24; Ambrose, *Hymn* 1,2.

40. Augustine has here traced four grades of goodness or beauty in descending order: moral (justice and prudence), intellectual (mind and intelligence), sensuous, and organic; he closes the sequence with a sham beauty that fades almost to nothing.

could be more innocent than you, who leave the wicked to be hounded by their own sins? Sloth pretends to aspire to rest, but what sure rest is there save the Lord? Lush living likes to be taken for contented abundance, but you are the full and inexhaustible store of a sweetness that never grows stale. Extravagance is a bogus generosity, but you are the infinitely wealthy giver of all good things. Avarice strives to amass possessions, but you own everything. Envy is contentious over rank accorded to another, but what ranks higher than you? Anger seeks revenge, but who ever exacts revenge with greater justice than yourself? Timidity dreads any unforeseen or sudden threat to the things it loves, and takes precautions for their safety; but is anything sudden or unforeseen to you? Who can separate what you love from you?⁴¹ Where is ultimate security to be found, except with you? Sadness pines at the loss of the good things with which greed took its pleasure, because it wants to be like you, from whom nothing can be taken away.⁴²

14. A soul that turns away from you therefore lapses into fornication⁴³ when it seeks apart from you what it can never find in pure and limpid form except by returning to you. All those who wander far away and set themselves up against you are imitating you, but in a perverse way;⁴⁴ yet by this very mimicry they proclaim that you are the creator of the whole of nature, and that in consequence there is no place whatever where we can hide from your presence.

With regard to my theft, then: what did I love in it, and in what sense did I imitate my Lord, even if only with vicious perversity? Did the pleasure I sought lie in breaking the law at least in that sneaky way, since I was unable to do so with any show of strength? Was I, in truth a prisoner, trying to simulate a crippled sort of freedom, attempting a shady parody of omnipotence by getting away with something forbidden? How like that servant of yours who fled from his Lord and hid in the shadows!⁴⁵ What rottenness, what a misshapen life! Rather a hideous pit of death! To do

41. See Rom 8:35.

42. All through this paragraph Augustine is demonstrating that each vice is a dishonest imitation of some attribute of God, and a pretension to possess apart from God something that he alone can give, since he alone possesses it authentically and in fullness.

43. See Ps 72(73):27.

44. The tempter's promise to Adam and Eve is in the background: *You shall be like gods* (Gn 3:5).

45. Adam (Gn 3:8-10), with whom Augustine identifies.

what was wrong simply because it was wrong—could I have found pleasure in that?

7. 15. How can I repay the Lord⁴⁶ for my ability to recall these things without fear? Let me love you, Lord, and give thanks to you and confess to your name, because you have forgiven my grave sins and wicked deeds.⁴⁷ By your sheer grace and mercy you melted my sins away like ice.⁴⁸ To your grace also do I ascribe whatever sins I did not commit, for what would I not have been capable of, I who could be enamored even of a wanton crime? I acknowledge that you have forgiven me everything, both the sins I willfully committed by following my own will, and those I avoided through your guidance.

Is there anyone who can take stock of his own weakness and still dare to credit his chastity and innocence to his own efforts? And could such a person think to love you less, on the pretext that he has had smaller need of your mercy, that mercy with which you forgive the sins of those who turn back to you? If there is anyone whom you have called, who by responding to your summons has avoided those sins which he finds me remembering and confessing in my own life as he reads this, let him not mock me; for I have been healed by the same doctor who has granted him the grace not to fall ill, or at least to fall ill less seriously. Let such a person therefore love you just as much, or even more, on seeing that the same physician who rescued me from sinful diseases of such gravity has kept him immune.

8. 16. What fruit did I ever reap from those things which I now blush to remember,⁴⁹ and especially from that theft in which I found nothing to love save the theft itself, wretch that I was? It was nothing, and by the very act of committing it I became more wretched still. And yet, as I recall my state of mind at the time, I would not have done it alone; I most certainly would not have done it alone. It follows, then, that I also loved the camaraderie with my fellow-thieves. So it is not true to say that I loved nothing other than the theft? Ah, but it is true, because that gang-mentality too was a nothing. What was it in fact? Who can teach me, except the One who illu-

46. See Ps 115(116):12.

47. Professor O'Donnell's comment cannot be bettered here: "Memory without fear is the fruit of forgiveness; love, thanksgiving, and confession are repayment to God for the forgiveness that has preceded all confession" (vol. 2, p. 140).

48. See Sir 3:17.

49. See Rom 6:21.

mines my heart⁵⁰ and distinguishes between its shadows? Why has this question come into my mind now, to be examined and discussed and considered? If the object of my love had been the pears I stole, and I simply wanted to enjoy them, I could have done it alone; similarly, if the act of committing the sin had sufficed by itself to yield me the pleasure I sought, I would not have further inflamed my itching desire by the stimulation of conspiracy. But since my pleasure did not lie in the pears, it must have been in the crime as committed in the company of others who shared in the sin.

9. 17. What kind of attitude was that? An extremely dishonorable one, certainly; alas for me, that I entertained it! Yet what exactly was it? Who understands his faults?⁵¹ The theft gave us a thrill, and we laughed to think we were outwitting people who had no idea what we were doing, and would angrily stop us if they knew. Why could I not have derived the same pleasure from doing it alone? Perhaps because it is not easy to enjoy a joke by oneself? Not easy, to be sure, but it does sometimes happen that people who are entirely alone, with no one else present, are overcome by laughter, if something very funny presents itself to their senses or their thoughts. Possibly ... but I would not have done that deed alone; in no way would I have done it alone. In your presence I declare it, my God, this is my soul's vivid remembrance. On my own I would not have perpetrated that theft in which I felt no desire for what I stole, but only for the act of stealing; to do it alone would have aroused no desire whatever in me, nor would I have done it.

What an exceedingly unfriendly form of friendship that was!⁵² It was a seduction of the mind hard to understand, which instilled into me a craving to do harm for sport and fun. I was greedy for another person's loss without any desire on my part to gain anything or to settle a score. Let the others only say, "Come on, let's go and do it!" and I am ashamed to hold back from the shameless act.

50. See Sir 2:10.

51. See Ps 18:13(19:12).

52. Augustine held a very high view of friendship, but here it is corrupt and corrupting friendship, a theme of Book II.

The prodigal's wanderings begin

10, 18. Who can unravel this most snarled, knotty tangle? It is disgusting, and I do not want to look at it or see it. O justice and innocence, fair and lovely, it is on you that I want to gaze with eyes that see purely and find satiety in never being sated. With you is rest and tranquil life. Whoever enters into you enters the joy of his Lord;⁵³ there he will fear nothing and find his own supreme good in God who is supreme goodness. I slid away from you and wandered away, my God; far from your steadfastness I strayed in adolescence, and I became to myself a land of famine.⁵⁴

Book III***Student Years at Carthage****Student life: sex and shows*

1, 1. So I arrived at Carthage, where the din of scandalous love-affairs raged cauldron-like around me.¹ I was not yet in love, but I was enamored with the idea of love, and so deep within me was my need that I hated myself for the sluggishness of my desires. In love with loving, I was casting about for something to love; the security of a way of life free from pitfalls seemed abhorrent to me, because I was inwardly starved of that food which is yourself, O my God. Yet this inner famine created no pangs of hunger in me. I had no desire for the food that does not perish, not because I had my fill of it, but because the more empty I was, the more I turned from it in revulsion. My soul's health was consequently poor. It was covered with sores and flung itself out of doors,² longing to soothe its misery by rubbing against sensible things; yet these were soulless, and so could not be truly loved. Loving and being loved were sweet to me, the more so if I could also enjoy a lover's body; so I polluted the stream of friendship with my filthy desires and clouded its purity with hellish lusts; yet all the while, befouled and disgraced though I was, my boundless vanity made me long to appear elegant and sophisticated. I blundered headlong into the love which I hoped would hold me captive, but in your goodness, O my God, my mercy,³ you sprinkled bitter gall over my sweet pursuits. I was loved, and I secretly entered into an enjoyable liaison, but I was also trammeling myself with fetters of distress, laying myself open to

53. See Mt 25:21.

54. See Lk 15:14. In this last sentence Augustine sums up his adolescent re-enactment of the prodigal's story.

1. The city was very prosperous when Augustine arrived there in his seventeenth year, and had for more than a century rivaled Alexandria in its claim to be the second city of the empire. Christianity had taken root there early, but paganism was still strong.
 2. The reference may be to Job (Jb 2:7-8), but Lazarus is probably in mind too (Lk 16:20).
 3. See Ps 58:18(59:17).

the iron rods and burning scourges of jealousy and suspicion, of fear, anger and quarrels.⁴

2. I was held spellbound by theatrical shows full of images that mirrored my own wretched plight and further fueled the fire within me.⁵ Why is it that one likes being moved to grief at the sight of sad or tragic events on stage, when one would be unwilling to suffer the same things oneself? In the capacity of spectator one welcomes sad feelings; in fact, the sadness itself is the pleasure. What incredible stupidity! The more a person is buffeted by such passions in his own life, the more he is moved by watching similar scenes on stage, although his state of mind is usually called misery when he is undergoing them himself and mercy⁶ when he shows compassion for others so afflicted. But how real is the mercy evoked by fictional dramas? The listener is not moved to offer help, but merely invited to feel sorrow; and the more intensely he feels it the more highly he rates the actor in the play. If these tragic human stories—whether referring to events long past or fictional—are played in such a way that they fail to move the spectator to sadness, he walks out in disgust, criticizing the performance; but if he feels sad, he stays on, keenly attentive, and enjoys a good cry.

3. So it is possible to enjoy sad feelings; yet there can be no doubt that everyone aspires to be happy. Can this be the reason: that no one wants to be miserable, but we do like to think ourselves merciful, and mercy must entail some sorrow? Can it be for this reason alone that sorrowful feelings are welcomed? To be sure, this power of sympathy derives from the stream of friendship. But where does it flow to, whither is it bound? Why does it debouch into a torrent of boiling pitch, into seething passions of monstrous lust, so that it loses itself in them, is diverted and thrown off course, and deviates by its own choice from its heavenly serenity? Is mercy, then, to be rejected? By no means; it is sometimes right to entertain compassionate feelings. But beware of impurity, my soul: under

4. See Gal 5:20.

5. The *spectacula* on offer included plays (Augustine's particular addiction), gladiatorial contests (Alypius' weakness; see VI,8,13) and the circus races.

6. Misery ... mercy: *miseria* ... *misericordia*. Augustine likes to play on these correlative words. In *The Catholic Way of Life* 27,53 he says that *misericordia* is so called because it makes *miserum* the heart (*cor*) of someone who feels compassion for another's misfortune.

guardianship of my God, the God of our fathers who is to be praised and most highly exalted for ever,⁷ beware of impurity.

Even today I am not devoid of merciful sensibility, but at that time it was different; I rejoiced with lovers on the stage who took sinful pleasure in one another, even though their adventures were only imaginary and part of a dramatic presentation, and when they lost each other I grieved with them, ostensibly merciful; yet in both instances I found pleasure in my emotions. Today I feel greater pity for someone who takes delight in a sinful deed than for someone else who seems to suffer grievously at the loss of pernicious pleasure and the passing of a bliss that was in fact nothing but misery. This is unquestionably a truer mercy, but the sadness it entails holds no attraction for me. A person who sorrows for someone who is miserable earns approval for the charity he shows, but if he is genuinely merciful he would far rather there were nothing to sorrow about. If such a thing as spiteful benevolence existed (which is impossible, of course, but supposing it did), a genuinely and sincerely merciful person would wish others to be miserable so that he could show them mercy!

We must conclude that, while some sorrow is commendable, no sorrow is to be valued for its own sake. You, Lord God, lover of souls, show mercy far more purely than we can, and in a way free from all taint, because no sorrow can wound you. Which of us is sufficient for this?

4. At that time I was truly miserable, for I loved feeling sad and sought out whatever could cause me sadness. When the theme of a play dealt with other people's tragedies—false and theatrical tragedies—it would please and attract me more powerfully the more it moved me to tears. I was an unhappy beast⁸ astray from your flock and resentful of your shepherding, so what wonder was it that I became infected with foul mange? My love for tragic scenes sprang from no inclination to be more deeply wounded by them, for I had no desire to undergo myself the woes I liked to watch. It was simply that when I listened to such doleful tales being told they enabled me superficially to scrape away at my itching self, with the result that these raking nails raised an inflamed swelling, and drew stinking discharge from a festering wound. Was that life I led any life at all, O my God?

7. See Dn 3:52.

8. *In felix pecus*: the words echo Virgil, *Eclogues* III,3, *infelix O semper, oves, pecus!* as well as the lost sheep of the gospel, Mt 18:22; Lk 15:4-7; see 1 Pt 2:25. Augustine may also have had in mind the last verse of Ps 118 (119), *I have gone astray like a sheep: seek your servant*, on which Ambrose commented very beautifully: see Ambrose, Sermon 22 on Psalm 118,3,27-30.

3. 5. Far above me your faithful mercy was hovering. How great were the sins on which I spent all my strength, as I followed my impious curiosity! It led me to abandon you and plunge into treacherous abysses, into depths of unbelief and a delusive allegiance to demons, to whom I was offering my evil deeds in sacrifice.⁹ And in all these sins your scourges beat upon me. Even within the walls of your church, during the celebration of your sacred mysteries, I once made bold to indulge in carnal desire and conduct that could yield only a harvest of death;¹⁰ and for this you struck me with severe punishments, though none that matched my guilt. O my God, you were immensely merciful to me,¹¹ and were my refuge from the terrible dangers amid which I wandered, head held high. I withdrew further and further from you, loving my own ways and not yours, relishing the freedom of a runaway slave.

The “wreckers”

6. The prestigious course of studies I was following looked as its goal to the law-courts, in which I was destined to excel and where I would earn a reputation all the higher in the measure that my performance was the more unscrupulous. So blind can people be that they glory even in their blindness! Already I was the ablest student in the school of rhetoric. At this I was elated and vain and swollen with pride; but as you know, O Lord, I was a good deal quieter than the “wreckers” and kept well clear of their destructive activities. I was ashamed of the sense of shame that held me back from being like these “wreckers,”¹² whose perverse and diabolical nickname is almost a badge of good education; I associated with them and sometimes enjoyed friendly contacts, but always recoiled from their acts of violence. They would chase sensitive freshmen relentlessly, taunting and hounding them on no provocation, simply for their own malicious amusement. Nothing is more like demonic activity than this behavior. What apter name could be found for such people than “wreckers”? They are first wrecked and twisted themselves; then the spirits who secretly seduce and deceive them laugh to see them deceiving and laughing at other people.

9. See Dt 32:17; 1 Cor 10:20.

10. See Rom 7:5.

11. *O tu praegrandis misericordia mea*: this phrase, and the similar but less strong *Deus meus, misericordia mea* in III,1,1, bracket by an invocation of God's true mercy Augustine's reflections on pseudo-mercy in the preceding paragraphs.

12. *Eversores*, literally those who upset, overthrow, sack a city.

The quest for wisdom: Cicero's Hortensius

4. 7. Still young and immature, I began in the company of these people to study treatises on eloquence. This was a discipline in which I longed to excel, though my motive was the damnable proud desire to gratify my human vanity. In the customary course of study I had discovered a book by an author called Cicero, whose language is almost universally admired, though not its inner spring. This book of his is called the *Hortensius*¹³ and contains an exhortation to philosophy. The book changed my way of feeling and the character of my prayers to you, O Lord, for under its influence my petitions and desires altered. All my hollow hopes suddenly seemed worthless, and with unbelievable intensity my heart burned with longing for the immortality that wisdom seemed to promise. I began to rise up, in order to return to you.¹⁴ My interest in the book was not aroused by its usefulness in the honing of my verbal skills (which was supposed to be the object of the studies I was now pursuing, in my nineteenth year, at my mother's expense, since my father had died two years earlier); no, it was not merely as an instrument for sharpening my tongue that I used that book, for it had won me over not by its style but by what it had to say.¹⁵

8. How ardently I longed, O my God, how ardently I longed to fly to you away from earthly things! I did not understand then how you were dealing with me. Wisdom resides with you,¹⁶ but love for wisdom is called by the Greek name “philosophy,” and this love it was that the book kindled in me. There are people who lead others astray under the pretense of philosophy, coloring and masking their errors under that great, fair, honorable name. Nearly all who did so in Cicero's own day are mentioned and shown up in his book; and there too one can almost find an exposition of the salutary warning given by your Spirit through your good, devout servant: *Take care that no one deceives you with philosophy and empty, misleading ideas derived from man-made traditions, centered on the elemental spirits of this world and not on Christ; for in him all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in bodily wise.*¹⁷ At the time these words of the apostle were still unknown to me; but you know, O light of my heart, that there was one thing and one only that brought me joy in the exhortation to wisdom: that

13. This book is lost, but known in fragments, mainly through the quotations elsewhere in Augustine's works. He continued to allude to and quote from it for more than fifty years.

14. The prodigal again; see Lk 15:18-20.

15. See Jb 12:13.16.

16. Col 2:8-9.

by its call I was aroused and kindled and set on fire to love and seek and capture and hold fast and strongly cling not to this or that school, but to wisdom itself, whatever it might be. Only one consideration checked me in my ardent enthusiasm: that the name of Christ did not occur there. Through your mercy, Lord, my tender little heart had drunk in that name, the name of my Savior and your Son, with my mother's milk, and in my deepest heart I still held on to it. No writing from which that name was missing, even if learned, of literary elegance and truthful, could ever captivate me completely.¹⁷

Distaste for scripture

5, 9. Accordingly I turned my attention to the holy scriptures to find out what they were like. What I see in them today is something not accessible to the scrutiny of the proud nor exposed to the gaze of the immature, something lowly as one enters but lofty as one advances further, something veiled in mystery. At that time, though, I was in no state to enter, nor prepared to bow my head and accommodate myself to its ways. My approach then was quite different from the one I am suggesting now: when I studied the Bible and compared it with Cicero's dignified prose, it seemed to me unworthy.¹⁸ My swollen pride recoiled from its style and my intelligence failed to penetrate to its inner meaning. Scripture is a reality that grows along with little children, but I disdained to be a little child¹⁹ and in my high and mighty arrogance regarded myself as grown up.

He joins the Manichees

6, 10. In reaction to this disappointment I fell among a set of proud madmen, exceedingly carnal and talkative people in whose mouths were diabolical snares²⁰ and a sticky mess compounded by mixing the syllables of your name, and the names of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit,

17. The Manichean writings, which he will shortly encounter, had the advantage over Cicero in this respect.

18. Augustine was reading the second-century Old Latin translation. Jerome was similarly put off; see his Letter 22,30.

19. See Mt 7:27.

20. See 1 Tm 3:7; 2 Tm 2:26.

who is our Paraclete and Consoler.²¹ These names were never far from their mouths, but amounted to no more than sound and the clacking of tongues, for their hearts were empty of the truth. They would say, "Truth, truth!" and had plenty to tell me on the subject, but truth had no place in them. They told me lies not only about you, who are truly the Truth, but also about the elements of this world that is your creation. I ought to have gone beyond them and beyond what even truthful philosophers have taught out of love for you, my Father, who are the highest good and the loveliness in all lovely things.

O Truth, Truth, how the deepest and innermost marrow of my mind ached for you, even then while they prattled your name to me unremittingly and in so many ways, though only in words and in their huge, copious tomes! I was hungering for you, but their teachings were like plates on which they served me not you but the sun and moon, which are your beautiful works, to be sure, but still your works, not yourself, and not even your primary works at that; for your spiritual creations are nobler than material creatures, nobler even than these brilliant heavenly bodies. I was hungering and thirsting for you, not for your creations, not even for your spiritual creations, but for yourself, O Truth, *in whom there is no variation, no play of changing shadow;*²² and all they set before me were dishes of glittering myths. It would have been more profitable to love the sun in the sky, which at least our eyes perceive truly, than those chimeras offered to a mind that had been led astray through its eyes.²³ Yet I ate those offerings, believing that I was feeding on you; I ate them without appetite, for there was no taste in my mouth of you as you are, since those insubstantial shams were not you. I derived no nourishment from them, but was left

21. He is referring to the Manichees. Their system was immensely powerful for minds preoccupied with the perennial tension between good and evil in every person. The Manichees grappled with the problem through the medium of myths concerning the origins of the cosmos. The system was radically dualistic: evil in the material world was explained by relegating God to its fringes and denying his omnipotence. There was a ruler of the realm of light (very different from the God of orthodox Christianity), and a cosmic "Christ" whose "power" dwelt in the sun and his "wisdom" in the moon. The historic Christ was not truly human. Mani himself, the founder of the sect, was identified with the Paraclete. Followers of the sect were divided into the "elect" and a lower grade of "hearers." Augustine himself seems never to have gone beyond the hearer stage.

22. Jas 1:17. The quotation is the more apt for the background it evokes in James' letter, where God is referred as the "Father of lights" in a completely un-Manichean sense.

23. In Manichean belief the sun and the moon served as vehicles for conveying elements of light, purified and released from this world, back to the realm of light. Sun and moon were therefore important, and in some sense divine.

the more drained. The food we dream we are eating in our sleep is very like the food we eat when awake, but it does not nourish the dreamers, because they are asleep. Those mythical objects, however, did not even come near to resembling you as you are when you speak to me today, because they were nothing but figments of the imagination invested with bodily form, counterfeit bodies. The material objects we see with our eyes of flesh, in the sky or on earth, are more real than they; what we see in company with the beasts and birds is far more dependable than images of the same things conjured up in our imagination. Yet even if we do but see these things in our mind's eye, still they are more real than other objects of which we might form some notion from them—greater, supposedly infinite beings which have no reality whatever. On such inanities was I being fed, and unfed I remained.

But you, O my love, for whom I faint with longing that I may be strong, you are not those material objects we can see, in heaven though they are, nor are you the beings we do not see there, for you have created them and do not even count them as your highest works. How much more distant are you, then, from mere figments of my imagination, fantasy-bodies that have no reality at all! More real are the memory-pictures we form of objects which at least do exist, and more real again than these are the physical beings themselves; yet none of these are you. Better and more certain than the bodies of material creatures is the soul that gives life to their bodies, yet you are not the soul either. You are the life of souls, the life of all lives, the life who are yourself living and unchanging, the life of my own soul.

11. Where were you at that time? How far from me? I was certainly roving far away from you, and debarred even from the pods I was feeding to pigs.²⁴ The fables of schoolmasters and poets are far better than the snares then being set for me; yes, verses, songs and tales of Medea in flight are undeniably more wholesome than myths about the five elements being metamorphosed to defeat the five caverns of darkness.²⁵ These latter have no truth in them at all and are lethal to anyone who believes them, whereas I can turn verse and song into a means of earning real food. When I sang of

24. See Lk 15:16.

25. According to the Manichees the realm of darkness comprised five caverns: of darkness, smoke, evil, wind, evil fire and evil water. Against them the cosmic man waged war, armed with the good elements of light, air, wind, fire, and water.

Medea in her flying chariot I was not vouching for any of it as fact, nor, when I listened to someone else singing of it, did I believe the story; but I did believe the Manichean lies. All the worse for me! By these stages I was led deeper into hell,²⁶ laboring and chafing under the scarcity of truth, because I was seeking you, my God, not through that power of the mind by which you have chosen to rank me above the beasts, but only through carnal inclination. To you do I confess this, for you showed mercy to me before ever I could confess it. You were more intimately present to me than my innermost being, and higher than the highest peak of my spirit.

But I stumbled upon that bold woman devoid of prudence in Solomon's allegory; she was sitting outside on her stool and inviting me: *Come and enjoy eating bread in secret, and drink sweet, stolen water.*²⁷ She seduced me because she found me living outside, in my carnal eyes, and ruminating within myself only on what I had devoured through them.

7, 12. The trouble was that I knew nothing else; I did not recognize the other, true reality. I was being subtly maneuvered into accepting the views of those stupid deceivers by the questions they constantly asked me about the origin of evil, and whether God was confined to a material form with hair and nails, and whether people who practiced polygamy, killed human beings and offered animal sacrifices could be considered righteous.²⁸ Being ignorant of these matters I was very disturbed by the questions, and supposed that I was approaching the truth when I was in fact moving away from it. I did not know that evil is nothing but the diminishment of good to the point where nothing at all is left. How could I see that, I whose power of sight was restricted to seeing material shapes with my eyes and imaginary forms with my mind?

26. See Prv 9:18.

27. Prv 9:17. Folly, this temptress in Prv 9:13-17, is the antithesis of wisdom, who is personified in the preceding verses as a woman inviting passers-by to her banquet.

28. Augustine is not concerned to give a full or fair account of the Manichean system, but he mentions here three problems that puzzled him, and which the Manichees at least raised, even if their answers were less than satisfactory. In Books V-VII he discusses the solutions (in reverse order). The first question (origin of evil), though clearly not new, was forced upon Jews and Christians in acute form by their belief in a good and omnipotent God, the second and third (spirituality of God and moral crudities in the Old Testament) by the anthropomorphisms and progressive character of biblical revelation. At this stage Augustine lacked the understanding to find adequate answers. Three times in this paragraph and the beginning of the next he says, "I did not know."

Nor did I know that God is spirit,²⁹ not a being with limbs stretching far and wide, and having a certain size. The notion of size implies that a body is smaller in a single part than in the whole of itself; so that, if it is infinite, it would somehow be smaller in a spatially defined section than spread out through infinity—rather than present everywhere in its entirety, as a spirit is and as God is. Moreover I had no inkling of what there could be in us which would give grounds for saying that we are made in the image of God, as scripture rightly says we are.³⁰

13. I did not know either that true inward righteousness takes as its criterion not custom but the most righteous law of almighty God, by which the morality of countries and times was formed as appropriate to those countries and times, while God's law itself has remained unchanged everywhere and always, not one thing in one place and something different elsewhere. By this norm Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David and all those of whom God spoke approvingly were indeed righteous; they are accounted guilty only by persons of limited experience who judge by *some human day of reckoning*³¹ and measure the conduct of the human race at large by the standard that befits their own. They are like someone who knows nothing about armor, or which piece belongs where, and tries to cover his head with the greaves and his feet with the helmet, and then grumbles because they do not fit properly. Or again, they are like a man who on a certain day which is appointed a public holiday from noon onward is indignant because he is not allowed to set out his goods for sale in the afternoon, although this was allowed in the morning; or like a person who in one and the same house sees something being handled by one servant which another one, who serves drinks, is not allowed to touch, or something being done behind the stables which is not properly done at table, and gets angry about this, complaining because, while there is one house and one staff of servants, the same actions are not permitted to everybody in all places.³² Equally foolish are people who grow indignant on hearing that some practice was allowed to righteous people in earlier ages which is forbidden to the righteous in our own day, and that God laid down one rule for the former and a different one for the latter, as the differ-

29. See Jn 4:24.

30. See Gn 1:27.

31. 1 Cor 4:3.

32. Three similes from Roman life: the army, the forum, and the household. Augustine will pick them up twice more before the end of the paragraph.

ence between the two periods of time demands; whereas in fact both sets of people have been subject to the same norm of righteousness. This attitude is just as stupid as being upset because, with regard to a single man or a single day or a single house, one perceives different pieces of armor to be designed for different limbs, and an activity to be lawful until a certain hour but not afterward, and something to be permitted or even ordered in a corner but forbidden and punished elsewhere. Does this mean that justice is fickle and changeable?³³ No, but the epochs over which she rules do not all unfold in the same way, precisely because times change. Human beings live on earth for a brief span only, and they lack the discernment to bring the conditions of earlier ages, of which they have no experience, into the same frame of reference with those they know well; but they can easily perceive in one body or one day or one house what is appropriate for each limb, each period of time and all persons and places. Thus while they may be scandalized by the one, they readily submit to the other.³⁴

14. All this was beyond my comprehension at the time and I made no allowance for it; although these truths leapt to the eye, I failed to see them. Yet I was quite accustomed to compose songs in which I was not free to place the metrical foot anywhere I fancied: different meters demanded different placing of the stress, and sometimes even within one line the feet were not uniform throughout. In spite of this, the art of poetry itself, in accordance with which I sang, was not different in different places, but worked always on the same principles. I lacked the insight to understand that justice, of which good and holy people are the servants, contains in itself, in a far more excellent and sublime way, the principles of all it prescribes, and is unvaryingly self-consistent, yet does not impose all its demands at once, but adjusts and allot to different periods the provisions most apt for them. In my blindness I censured the holy patriarchs, who not only made use of the opportunities available to them in the way ordained and inspired by God, but also prefigured what was to come, as God revealed it through them.

33. Augustine is quoting Virgil, *Aeneid* IV,569, where the epithets are applied to woman by Mercury, who is instructing Aeneas to terminate his affair with Dido, who scarcely merits them.

34. It is part of Augustine's greatness that he tentatively applies to some problems of the Old Testament principles of interpretation based on historical development, which would be elaborated centuries later.

8.15. Can we suppose that it is ever or anywhere unjust to love God with one's whole heart, whole soul and whole mind, and to love one's neighbor as oneself?³⁵ By the same token, vices contrary to nature are everywhere and always to be detested and punished. Such were the sins of the Sodomites. If all nations behaved as the Sodomites did, they too would be held guilty under the divine law, which did not make men to have that kind of relationship with each other. The very fellowship which ought to hold between ourselves and God is violated when our nature is defiled by perverted lust, since our nature is his creation.

Transgressions against human codes are a different matter: they vary in accordance with variable customs; but they are to be avoided all the same, lest an agreement made by citizens or compatriots among themselves, and rendered stable by custom and law, be violated at the whim of any citizen or foreigner; for a part which fails to harmonize with the whole is a source of mischief. If, on the other hand, God commands something which conflicts with the customs or rules of any human society, then it is to be done, even if it has never been done there before; if it has fallen into abeyance, it must be restored, or if not established previously, it must be established now. After all, a king has the right to command that something be done in the state over which he reigns, even if neither he nor any of his predecessors has ever ordered it before. To obey him in such an instance does not undermine that community; indeed, to disobey him would harm it, for a general contract to obey its rulers holds good in human society. How much more, then, are we bound unhesitatingly to serve God, the Ruler over all creation, in any matter where he commands us! As in the hierarchy of human society a more powerful official is placed above one of lesser rank and is to be obeyed, so God stands above all.

16. It is the same with crimes against the person. They may spring from a desire to hurt another person, whether by insulting language or by injury, and in either case may be prompted by a spirit of revenge, as when someone attacks his enemy. Or the motive may be to secure something belonging to another, as when a robber attacks a traveler, or to forestall some evil, when one attacks a person of whom one is afraid. Again, crime may be motivated by envy, as when a person in wretched circumstances envies one more fortunate, or one who is successful in an enterprise jealously injures another because he fears the other will catch up with him, or

35. See Mt 22:37.39; Mk 12:30.33; Lk 10:27.

is chagrined because that person already has. Or it may simply be pleasure in the misfortunes of others that tempts people to crime: this is the pleasure felt by those who watch gladiators, and anyone who laughs and mocks at other people.

These are the chief kinds of sin, which sprout from a craving for domination, or for watching shows, or for sensory pleasure,³⁶ or from any two of these, or all three together. The consequence is an evil life in opposition to that other "three plus seven," the ten-stringed harp, your decalogue, O God most high and most sweet.³⁷

But how can our vices touch you, who are incorruptible? What crimes can be committed against you, who are immune from harm? You avenge them nonetheless by causing the sin to rebound on the sinner, for even when people sin against you, they are maliciously damaging their own souls. Iniquity plays itself false³⁸ when it corrupts and perverts its own nature, to which you gave life and order, or when it makes intemperate use of lawful things, or again when it burns with desire for other things not permitted, lusting to enjoy them in a way contrary to nature. Or again, the guilt of sinners may lie in rebelling against you in word or intention, thereby kicking against the goad,³⁹ or in casting off the restraints of human society and defiantly enjoying private alliances and feuds, as dictated by their own likes and dislikes. This is what happens when anyone abandons you, the fountain of life,⁴⁰ the One, the true creator and ruler of the universe, and in self-sufficient arrogance chooses to love a part of it only, a bogus "one."⁴¹

Yet through loving humility we find our way back to you. You purify our evil dispositions; you are merciful toward the sins of those who confess to you; you hear the groans of captives⁴² and set us free from the bonds we have forged for ourselves, provided only we no longer defy you in the arrogance of a spurious freedom, greedy to have more and thereby

36. The three classic temptations once more.

37. The first three of the ten commandments relate to God, the remaining seven to relationships with one's neighbors; hence for Augustine 3+7 makes up the ten-stringed harp of Ps 32(33):2, on which we praise God.

38. See Ps 26(27):12.

39. See Acts 9:5; 26:14.

40. See Jer 2:13.

41. According to the Neo-Platonists the destiny of human beings is to love and cleave to the One; sin consists in turning away from the One and becoming engrossed in the life of the senses, and thus setting up a false center, or false "One."

42. See Ps 101:21(102:20).

incurring the loss of everything, loving some advantage of our own better than yourself, who are the good of all.

9. 17. Particularly deserving of mention among vices, crimes and the many other kinds of iniquity are the sins of those who are making some progress, sins which in the eyes of people qualified to judge are at the same time blameworthy when measured by ideal standards yet praiseworthy inasmuch as they offer hope for the future, as green shoots promise the crop. There are also certain deeds which look like vices or crimes against others, yet are not really sins, for they offend neither you, our Lord and God, nor the human community. So, for instance, someone may accumulate goods for use in ordinary life or to meet some particular need, yet it is by no means sure that any avarice was involved; or again, people are punished by someone in authority zealous for their correction, but there it is not clear whether vindictiveness played any part. It happens, therefore, that many things are done which to human judgment would seem to merit condemnation, yet are expressly commended by you, while many actions approved by human reckoning are by you explicitly condemned, because often there is a discrepancy between the appearance of an action and the intention of the agent; and the circumstances of the time, which may be obscure, make a difference too.

When you suddenly command some unusual, unexpected course of action, then even if it is something you have hitherto forbidden, even if for the time being you conceal the reason for your behest, and even if it contravenes the accepted norms of a human society, can we doubt that it is right to obey, seeing that a human society is just precisely insofar as it serves you? Blessed are they who know that you have commanded them. Everything that is done by your servants is done either to make plain what needs to be revealed at present, or to foreshadow the future.

10. 18. I knew nothing of all this, and so I derided your holy servants and prophets. Even as I laughed at them I deserved to be laughed at by you, for gradually, little by little, I was being lured into such absurdities as the belief that a fig wept when plucked, and its mother tree too wept milky tears. Then, I was told, if one of the saints ate the fig (plucked, of course, not by any fault on his part but by someone else's⁴³), it would be absorbed by his digestive system and then when he belched or groaned in prayer he

43. That is, by one of the hearers, content with a lower grade of sanctity, and privileged to provide food for the elect.

would spew out angels, or even particles of God. These particles of God most high, of the true God, would have remained trapped in the fruit unless liberated by the teeth and belly⁴⁴ of one of the holy elect! I believed, poor wretch, that it was accordingly a higher duty to show mercy to the fruits of the earth than to human beings, for whom they came into existence; for if some hungry person who was not a Manichee asked for one, it was believed that to give it to him entailed passing a death-sentence on that morsel.

Monica, grieved, is consoled by a vision

11. 19. You stretched out your hand from on high and pulled my soul⁴⁵ out of these murky depths because my mother, who was faithful to you, was weeping for me more bitterly than ever mothers wept for the bodily death of their children. In her faith and in the spiritual discernment she possessed by your gift she regarded me as dead; and you heard her, O Lord, you heard her and did not scorn those tears of hers which gushed forth and watered the ground beneath her eyes wherever she prayed. Yes, you did indeed hear her, for how else can I account for the dream by which you so comforted her that she agreed to live with me and share my table, under the same roof? She had initially been reluctant to do so, repelled by my blasphemous errors, which were loathsome to her. But she dreamt that she was standing on some kind of wooden ruler,⁴⁶ and saw a young man of radiant aspect coming toward her; he cheerfully laughed at her, whereas she was sorrowful, overwhelmed with grief. He asked her the reason for her gloom and daily tears, though as usual his question was intended to teach her, not to elicit information for himself.⁴⁷ She replied that she was mourning my ruin. He then instructed and admonished her to take good heed and see that where she stood, there also stood I. This was to reassure her. She took heed, and saw me standing close beside her on the same rule.

44. *Dente ac ventre*, a contemptuous assonance.

45. See Ps 143(144):7.

46. *In quadam regula linea*. The most obvious translation would envisage a wooden ruler of inordinate size, and this may be right. Alternatively it has been suggested that the *regula* was a leveling device used in building aqueducts, raised a few feet off the ground. In either case there is probably a conscious reference to the *regula fidei*, the faith professed at baptism.

47. This may suggest that the young man was Christ, who was in the habit of asking leading questions.

How else could this have happened, if not because your ears were open to the plea of her heart, O good and all-powerful God, who care for each of us as though each were the only one, and for all alike with the same tenderness you show to each?

20. Another telling point was that when she had related the vision to me, and I had launched into an attempt to persuade her that she must not give up hope of some day becoming what I was, she promptly replied, without the slightest hesitation, "No: I was not told, 'Where he is, you will be too,' but, 'Where you are, he will be.'" I confess to you, Lord, that, as my memory serves me—and I have often spoken of this episode—I was more deeply disturbed by this answer that came from you through my sharp-eyed mother than by the dream itself. She was not worried by the false interpretation that had come to me so pat, but saw immediately what needed to be seen, as I had not done until she spoke. The dream foretold, so long in advance, the joy in store for this devout woman many years later, and so gave her comfort in her present anxiety. Nearly nine years were to follow during which I floundered in the mud of the deep⁴⁸ and the darkness of deception, often struggling to extricate myself but crashing heavily back again. Yet throughout those years my mother, a chaste, God-fearing, sensible widow of the kind so dear to you, though more eager in her hope was no less assiduous in her weeping and entreaty, never at any time ceasing her plangent prayers to you about me. Her pleas found their way into your presence, but you left me still wrapped around by the fog, and enveloped in it.

"A son of tears"

12, 21. Meanwhile you gave another answer, as I recall. (I am, of course, omitting many things, being in a hurry to get to those which more powerfully impel me to praise you; and in any case there are many that I do not remember.) You gave this second answer through a priest of yours, a certain bishop who had been nurtured in the Church and well versed in your scriptures. The woman asked him if he would be so kind as to talk to me, to rebut my errors, disabuse me of my harmful persuasions and teach me good ones; for he was used to doing this, whenever he happened to find anyone apt to profit by it. He refused, however, and very wisely, as I subsequently understood. He replied that I was as yet unteachable; I was puffed up with the

48. See Ps 68:3(69:2).

novelty of my heresy and had been tormenting plenty of unskilled persons with finicky little questions, as she told him. "Leave him alone," he advised. "Simply pray for him to the Lord. He will find out for himself through his reading how wrong these beliefs are, and how profoundly irreverent." At the same interview he told her how he had himself been handed over to the Manichees as a little boy by his mother, who had also been led astray; he had not only read nearly all their books but had even written some himself,⁴⁹ and without anyone having to argue or persuade him it had become clear to him that the sect was something he should flee from. So he had fled.

These assurances did not satisfy her. She pleaded all the more insistently and with free-flowing tears that he would consent to see me and discuss matters with me. A little vexed, he answered, "Go away now; but hold on to this: it is inconceivable that he should perish, a son of tears like yours." In her conversations with me later she often recalled that she had taken these words to be an oracle from heaven.⁵⁰

48. Or, perhaps, merely copied Manichean works. The story of this unnamed bishop, like that of Victorinus later, mirrors Augustine's own.
 50. This "voice from heaven" that solemnly closes Book III is paralleled by that at the end of the garden scene in Book VIII.

Book VI

*Milan, 385:
Progress, Friends, Perplexities*

1. O you who have been my hope since my youth¹ where were you when I sought you? How was it that you had gone so far away?² Had you not created me and marked me out from the four-footed beasts, and made me wiser than the birds in the sky?³ Yet I was walking a dark and slippery path, searching for you outside myself⁴ and failing to find the God of my own heart.⁵ I had sunk to the depth of the sea,⁶ I lost all faith and despaired of ever finding the truth.

Monica comes to Milan

Steadfast in her fidelity, my mother had by this time rejoined me, for so completely did she trust in you that she had not feared to follow me over land and sea.⁷ Indeed, amid the perils of the voyage it was she who kept up the spirits of the sailors, though in the ordinary way it is to them that inexperienced and frightened travelers look for reassurance. She, however, had dared to promise them that they would come safely to port, because you had yourself made this promise to her in a dream. She found me, by contrast, beset by mortal danger as I despaired of discovering the truth. When I told her that I was no longer a Manichee, though not a Catholic Christian either, she was overjoyed, but not as though this news had taken

1. See Ps 70(71):5.

2. See Ps 9:22(10:1).

3. Jb 35:11 (Old Latin).

4. This sounds Neo-Platonic, but the more significant comparison is with X,27,38.

5. See Ps 72(73):26.

6. See Ps 67:23(68:22); there may also be an allusion to Jonah.

7. See Virgil, *Aeneid* IX,492. Monica's voyage would probably have been in the spring of 385, when sailing became possible after the winter storms.

her by surprise. She was already confident with regard to my wretched condition to this extent, that while she constantly wept over me in your sight as over a dead man, it was over one who though dead could still be raised to life again; she offered me to you upon the bier of her meditation, begging you to say to this widow's son, *Young man, arise, I tell you*,⁸ that he might live again and begin to speak, so that you could restore him to his mother.⁹ Accordingly, when she learned that what she tearfully begged of you every day had been partially granted, inasmuch as I had now been delivered from falsehood, even if I had not yet found the truth, there was no wild excitement or agitation in her heartfelt joy. So certain was she that you, who had promised her everything, would grant what was still lacking, that she told me very tranquilly and with full confidence that in Christ she believed she would see me a faithful Catholic before she departed from this life.

So much she said to me; but to you, the fount of all mercy, she redoubled her prayers and tears, imploring you to make haste to my help¹⁰ and enlighten my darkness.¹¹ She hurried all the more eagerly to church and hung upon Ambrose's preaching, in which she found a spring of water leaping up to eternal life.¹² She revered that man as an angel of God,¹³ for she realized that it was thanks to him that I had meanwhile been brought to my present point of wavering; and she foresaw with certainty that I would have to pass through a still more dangerous condition—a crisis, as the physicians call it—on my way from sickness to health.

2. In Africa she had been accustomed to make offerings of pottage, bread and wine at the tombs of the martyrs. When she attempted to do the same here, she was prevented by the doorkeeper; but as soon as she learned that it was the bishop who had forbidden the practice she complied in so devoted and obedient a spirit that I marveled at the attitude she had so readily adopted: criticizing her own custom rather than sitting in judgment

8. Lk 7:14.

9. The translation offered here assumes the punctuation *sed neque catholicum christianum, non quasi inopinatum aliquid audierit exilivit laetitia, cum iam secura...* Some editors of the Latin text place a comma after *non*, which would oblige us to understand that Monica was not overjoyed, because she had expected the news.

10. See Ps 69:2(70:1).

11. See Ps 17:29(18:28).

12. See Jn 4:14.

13. See Gal 4:14. *Diligebat*: she revered or esteemed him, a verb with fewer carnal overtones than *amo*. Augustine makes the same distinction in V,13,23 between Ambrose's attitude to himself and his to Ambrose.

on his prohibition.¹⁴ And no wonder, for her mind was not enslaved to any habit of wine-bibbing, nor did addiction to wine incite her to hatred of the truth, as is the case with many men and women who are as disgusted by any commendation of sobriety as are drunkards when offered watered-down wine. With my mother it was otherwise: she would bring her basket containing the festive fare which it fell to her to taste first and then distribute; but she would then set out no more than one small cup, mixed to suit her abstemious palate, and from that she would only sip for courtesy's sake. If it happened that there were many shrines of the dead to be honored in this manner she would carry round this same single cup and set it forth in each place. She thus served to her fellow-worshippers extremely sparing allowances of wine which was not only heavily diluted but by this time no more than lukewarm. What she sought to promote at these gatherings was piety, not intemperance.

Once she had ascertained, however, that Ambrose, illustrious preacher and exemplar of piety as he was, had forbidden the celebration of these rites even by those who conducted them with restraint, lest any opportunity might be given to drunkards to indulge in excess, and also because the custom resembled the cult of ancestors and so was close kin to the superstitious practices of the pagans,¹⁵ she most willingly gave it up. She had now seen the wisdom of bringing to the martyrs' shrines not a basket full of the fruits of the earth, but a heart full of more purified offerings, her prayers. In consequence she was now able to give alms to the needy, and it was also possible for the sacrament of the Lord's Body to be celebrated at these shrines—and fittingly, since it was in imitation of his passion that the martyrs offered themselves in sacrifice and were crowned.

All the same, O Lord my God—and in your presence I speak truly from my heart on this matter—it seems to me unlikely that my mother would have yielded easily over the abolition of this custom had it been forbidden by anyone other than Ambrose, whom she highly revered. It was above all for the part he played in my salvation that she esteemed him; and he for his part held her in like esteem for her deeply religious way of life. Her spiritual fervor¹⁶

14. Later, in Africa, Augustine made efforts to stamp out similar grave-cults there too. In addition to their pagan associations, they lent themselves to drunkenness and licentious revelry, but they died hard, since they also contained a core of genuine piety.

15. The Roman pagan festival, *Parentalia*, celebrated 18-21 February, was marked by offerings to the shades of the ancestors.

16. See Rom 12:11.

prompted her to assiduous good works¹⁷ and brought her constantly to church; and accordingly when Ambrose saw me he would often burst out in praise of her, telling me how lucky I was to have such a mother. Little did he know what a son she had: I was full of doubts about all these things and scarcely believed it possible to find the way of life.¹⁸

Bishop Ambrose

3. 3. Not yet had I begun to pour forth my groans to you in prayer, begging you to help me; rather was my mind intent on searching and restlessly eager for argument. Now I regarded Ambrose as a fortunate man as far as worldly standing went, since he enjoyed the respect of powerful people; it was only his celibacy which seemed to me a burdensome undertaking. I had not begun to guess, still less experience in my own case, what hope he bore within him, or what a struggle he waged against the temptations to which his eminent position exposed him, or the encouragement he received in times of difficulty, or what exquisite delights he savored in his secret mouth, the mouth of his heart, as he chewed the bread of your word.

Nor was he aware of my spiritual turmoil or the perilous pit before my feet.¹⁹ There were questions I wanted to put to him, but I was unable to do so as fully as I wished, because the crowds of people who came to him on business impeded me, allowing me little opportunity either to talk or to listen to him. He was habitually available to serve them in their needs, and in the very scant time that he was not with them he would be refreshing either his body with necessary food or his mind with reading. When he read his eyes would travel across the pages and his mind would explore the sense, but his voice and tongue were silent.²⁰ We would sometimes be present, for he did not forbid anyone access, nor was it customary for anyone to be announced; and

17. See 1 Tm 5:10; 6:18.

18. For the "way of life" see Ps 15(16):11; Prv 6:23; 10:17; 15:10. All these passages from Proverbs associate the way of life with acceptance of discipline.

19. See Mt 15:14.

20. This famous passage has sometimes been taken to imply that Ambrose invented silent reading. It was undoubtedly known earlier. See Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* V,40,116 on the advantage the deaf may derive from reading poetry. Augustine himself silently peruses scripture at VIII,12,29. But reading aloud or in a muttered undertone was the more common practice and long continued so. Saint Benedict's *Rule* (48,5) reminds monks who read while lying on their beds to do so without disturbing their neighbors. Until at least the end of the Middle Ages the reading of scripture was understood as an activity involving the whole person, physical as well as mental and spiritual; gastronomic metaphors of mastication such as chewing the cud were commonly used for it, as is the case a few lines above.

on these occasions we watched him reading silently. It was never otherwise, and so we too would sit for a long time in silence, for who would have the heart to interrupt a man so engrossed? Then we would steal away, guessing that in the brief time he had seized for the refreshment of his mind he was resting from the din of other people's affairs and reluctant to be called away to other business. We thought too that he might be apprehensive that if he read aloud, and any closely attentive listener were doubtful on any point, or the author he was reading used any obscure expressions, he would have to stop and explain various difficult problems that might arise, and after spending time on this be unable to read as much of the book as he wished. Another and perhaps more cogent reason for his habit of reading silently was his need to conserve his voice, which was very prone to hoarseness. But whatever his reason, that man undoubtedly had a good one.²¹

4. This meant, however, that no opportunity at all was given me to find out what I longed to know from your holy oracle, Ambrose's heart. At most, I could only put a point to him briefly, whereas my inner turmoil was at such a feverish pitch that I needed to find him completely at leisure if I were to pour it all out, and I never did so find him. Nonetheless I listened to him *straightforwardly expounding the word of truth*²² to the people every Sunday, and as I listened I became more and more convinced that it was possible to unravel all those cunning knots of calumny in which the sacred books had been entangled by tricksters who had deceived me and others. I came to realize that your spiritual children, whom you had brought to a new birth by grace from their mother, the Catholic Church, did not in fact understand the truth of your creating human beings in your image²³ in so crude a way that they believed you to be determined by the form of a human body. Although I had not even a faint or shadowy notion²⁴ of what a spiritual substance could be like, I was filled with joy, albeit a shamefaced joy, at the discovery that what I had barked against for so many years was not the Catholic faith but the figments of carnal imagination. I had been all

21. The contrast is clear between Ambrose and the glib and available Faustus in Book V. Augustine had approached Faustus hoping for wisdom and found only a ready tongue; he initially approached Ambrose (in public) to enjoy his eloquence, only to find himself attracted willy-nilly by its content. Ambrose's apportioning of his time was similar to what Augustine would aim at himself as a bishop; see XI,2,2. Augustine was also very conscious that one who expounds the scriptures to others must do a great deal of silent listening himself.

22. 2 Tm 2:15.

23. See Gn 1:26-27; 9:6; Sir 17:1.

24. See 1 Cor 13:12.

the more foolhardy and impious in my readiness to rant and denounce where I ought to have inquired and sought to learn.²⁵

O God, most high, most deep, and yet nearer than all else, most hidden yet intimately present, you are not framed of greater and lesser limbs; you are everywhere, whole and entire in every place, but confined to none. In no sense is our bodily form to be attributed to you, yet you have made us in your own image, and lo! here we are, from head to foot set in our place!

Augustine finds some enlightenment

4, 5. Since I did not know how your image could exist in us I would, given the chance, have knocked at the door²⁶ and proposed my question about how the doctrine was to be believed, instead of opposing it with insults as though it had been believed in the absurd way I had assumed. The anxiety which gnawed at my inner self to determine what I could hold onto as certain was the more intense in proportion to my shame at remembering how long I had been deluded and beguiled by assurances that falsehoods were certain, and had in my headstrong, childish error babbled about such very dubious things as though they were proven. Later on it became clear to me that these tenets were false; but at the time I was at least certain of this, that while they were uncertain I had for a while held them to be certain, and had been arguing blindly in the objections I raised against your Catholic Church. I had not yet come to accept her teachings as true, but at least I now knew that she did not teach the doctrines to which I had gravely objected.

Thus it was that I was put to shame and forced to turn about.²⁷ I rejoiced to find that your one and only Church, the body of your only Son,²⁸ that Church within which I had been signed with Christ's name in my infancy, did not entertain infantile nonsense or include in her sound teaching any belief that would seem to confine you, the creator of all things, in any place however vast and spacious, in any place that would hem you in on every side after the manner of human bodies.

25. Reading *discere*. Some manuscripts have *dicere*, "I ought to have spoken in an inquiring spirit."

26. See Mt 7:7.

27. See Ps 6:11, the psalmist's plea against his enemies. Augustine reverses the order of the verbs, and with it the sense.

28. See Col 1:18,24.

6. Another thing that brought me joy was that the ancient writings of the law and the prophets were now being offered to me under quite a different aspect from that under which they had seemed to me absurd when I believed that your holy people held such crude opinions; for the fact was that they did not. I delighted to hear Ambrose often asserting in his sermons to the people, as a principle on which he must insist emphatically, *The letter is death-dealing, but the spirit gives life.*²⁹ This he would tell them as he drew aside the veil of mystery³⁰ and opened to them the spiritual meaning of passages which, taken literally, would seem to mislead. He said nothing which offended me, even though I still did not know whether what he said was true. In my heart I was hanging back from any assent, dreading a headlong fall, and nearly died by hanging instead. I longed to become as certain of those things I could not see as I was that seven and three make ten. I was not so demented as to think that even this simple truth was beyond comprehension; but I wanted to have the same grasp of other things, both material entities not immediately present to my senses and spiritual realities of which I did not know how to think in any but a materialistic way. The possibility of healing was, ironically, within my reach if only I had been willing to believe, because then I could with a more purified mind have focused my gaze on your truth, which abides for ever³¹ and is deficient in nothing. But just as someone who has suffered under a bad physician may often be afraid to entrust himself to a good one, so it was in my soul's case. It could be healed only by believing, yet it shirked the cure for fear of believing what was false. It struggled in your hands,³² though it is you who have prepared the healing remedies of faith and spread them over the ills of the world, enduing them with marvelous potency.

5. 7. Against this background, however, I now began to prefer Catholic doctrine. True, some of its propositions were not demonstrated rationally, either because there might be no one present to whom they could be demonstrated or because they were not demonstrable at all; but I came to see that in commanding that certain things must be believed without demonstration the Church was a good deal more moderate and very much less deceitful than those parties who rashly promised knowledge and

29. 2 Cor 3:6.

30. See 2 Cor 3:14-16.

31. See Ps 116(117):2.

32. See Dn 4:32(35).

derided credulity, but then went on to demand belief in a whole host of fabulous and absurd myths which certainly could not be demonstrated.

So it was, Lord, that you began little by little to work on my heart with your most gentle and merciful hand, and dispose it to reflect how innumerable were the things I believed and held to be true, though I had neither seen them nor been present when they happened. How many truths there were of this kind, such as events of world history, or facts about places and cities I had never seen; how many were the statements I believed on the testimony of friends, or physicians, or various other people; and, indeed, unless we did believe them we should be unable to do anything in this life. With what unshakable certainty, moreover, did I hold fast to the belief that I had been born of my particular parents, yet I could not have known this without believing what I had heard.

So you persuaded me that the truly blameworthy people were not those who believed in your scriptures, the scriptures which you had established with such authority throughout almost all nations,³³ but those who refused to believe in them; and it was to these people that I should beware of listening if by chance any of them might challenge me by asking, "How do you know that those books were provided for the human race by the Spirit of the one, real and most truthful God?" It was precisely this fact that most commended itself to belief, because not one of the slanderous disputes to be found in the works of philosophers who disagreed among themselves, in any of the vast number of books I had read, had ever been able to wrench away from me the belief that you exist, whatever may be your nature (and of this I was ignorant) and that the course of human affairs concerns you.³⁴

8. This conviction was sometimes strong in me, sometimes feeble; but I always believed in your existence and your care for us, even though I did not know what to think about your essential nature, or conceive what way

33. The scriptures were not some esoteric documents reserved for initiates, but publicly available; the Christian Church was a visible, historical community whose message concerned historical facts. These claims were constantly and proudly made, and they carried weight with Augustine even before he came to accept the message. His approach to Christian faith was by way of an initial acceptance of the authority of scripture as authentically from God, as an incarnation of the Word in the sacred text, before he was ready to assent to its specific teachings.

34. Most philosophers, including the Stoics and the Neo-Platonists, in fact agreed on the fundamental truths of the existence of God and his governance of the world; see Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* II,1,3.

could lead me, or lead me back, to you.³⁵ It was because we were weak³⁶ and unable to find the truth by pure reason that we needed the authority of the sacred scriptures; and so I began to see that you would not have endowed them with such authority among all nations unless you had willed human beings to believe in you and seek you through them.

Having already heard many parts of the sacred books explained in a reasonable and acceptable way, I came to regard those passages which had previously struck me as absurd, and therefore repelled me, as holy and profound mysteries.³⁷ The authority of the sacred writings seemed to me all the more deserving of reverence and divine faith in that scripture was easily accessible to every reader, while yet guarding a mysterious dignity in its deeper sense. In plain words and very humble modes of speech it offered itself to everyone, yet stretched the understanding of those who were not shallow-minded.³⁸ It welcomed all comers to its hospitable embrace, yet through narrow openings³⁹ attracted a few to you—a few, perhaps, but far more than it would have done had it not spoken with such noble authority and drawn the crowds to its embrace by its holy humility.

All the while, Lord, as I pondered these things you stood by me; I sighed and you heard me; I was tossed to and fro and you steered me aright. I wandered down the wide road of the world, but you did not desert me.

Hollowness of his secular ambitions; the drunken beggar

6. 9. I was hankering after honors, wealth and marriage, but you were laughing at me.⁴⁰ Very bitter were the frustrations I endured in chasing my desires, but all the greater was your kindness in being less and less prepared to let anything other than yourself grow sweet to me. Look at my heart, Lord, you who have willed me to remember this and confess to you. You freed my soul from the close-clinging, sticky morass of death; let it

35. *Via*, the Way, Christ. Compare "the Truth," just below.

36. Rom 5:6.

37. *Ad sacramentorum altitudinem referebam*. The word *sacramentum* (originally a military oath) acquired rich content in the Christian Fathers. In Augustine it covers both the mysterious meanings hidden in the sacred text, and the grace-giving rites of the Church, both being sacred signs. The Christian bishop has the duty of dispensing both.

38. Sir 19:4.

39. See Mt 19:24, the eye of the needle, and Mt 7:13, the narrow gate. Contrast the "wide road" at the end of this chapter.

40. See Pss 2:4; 36(37):13.

now cling to you.⁴¹ How wretched it was! You probed its wound to the raw, to persuade it to leave all else behind⁴² and be converted to you⁴³ who are above all things,⁴⁴ without whom nothing whatever would exist—be converted to you and find healing.⁴⁵

I recall how miserable I was, and how one day you brought me to a realization of my miserable state. I was preparing to deliver a eulogy upon the emperor in which I would tell plenty of lies with the object of winning favor with the well-informed by my lying; so my heart was panting with anxiety and seething with feverish, corruptive thoughts. As I passed through a certain district in Milan I noticed a poor beggar, drunk, as I believe, and making merry. I groaned and pointed out to the friends who were with me how many hardships our idiotic enterprises entailed. Goaded by greed, I was dragging my load of unhappiness along, and feeling it all the heavier for being dragged. Yet while all our efforts were directed solely to the attainment of unclouded joy, it appeared that this beggar had already beaten us to the goal, a goal which we would perhaps never reach ourselves. With the help of the few paltry coins he had collected by begging, this man was enjoying the temporal happiness for which I strove by so bitter, devious and roundabout a contrivance. His joy was no true joy, to be sure, but what I was seeking in my ambition was a joy far more unreal; and he was undeniably happy while I was full of foreboding; he was carefree, I apprehensive. If anyone had questioned me as to whether I would rather be exhilarated or afraid, I would of course have replied, "Exhilarated"; but if the questioner had pressed me further, asking whether I preferred to be like the beggar, or to be as I was then, I would have chosen to be myself, laden with anxieties and fears. Surely that would have been no right choice, but a perverse one? I could not have preferred my condition to his on the grounds that I was better educated, because that fact was not for me a source of joy but only the means by which I sought to curry favor with human beings: I was not aiming to teach

41. See Pss 62:9(63:8); 72(73):28.

42. See Lk 5:11, 28, on the call of the apostles.

43. See Pss 21:28(22:27); 50:15(51:13).

44. See Rom 9:5.

45. See Is 6:10; Mt 13:15.

them but only to win their favor; and this was why you broke my bones⁴⁶ with the rod of your discipline.⁴⁷

10. I have no patience with anyone who would say to my soul, "But it makes a difference what a person is happy about; that beggar was enjoying his intoxication, you longed to bask in glory." What kind of glory was that, Lord? No glory that was to be found in you;⁴⁸ for just as his was no true joy, so mine was no true glory, and it turned my head more fatally. He would sleep off his intoxication that same night, whereas I had slept with mine and risen up again, and would sleep and rise with it again ... how many days! I know that it does indeed make a difference what one is joyful about, and the joy of faithful hope is incomparably distant from that empty enjoyment; but even as things were then there was a vast distance between us: he was the happier, not only inasmuch as he was flooded with merriment while I was torn with cares, but also because he had earned his wine by wishing good-day to passers-by, while I was seeking a swollen reputation by lying.

I spoke fully to my friends on these lines, and often in similar circumstances took stock of my reactions. It grieved me that I should be like this, and I took it badly, and this in itself increased my grief. If some good fortune did smile upon me, I felt it not worthwhile to seize it, because almost before I had hold of it, away it would fly.

Alypius

7, 11. Those of us who lived as friends together sighed deeply over these experiences, and I discussed them most especially and intimately with Alypius and Nebridius.⁴⁹ Alypius and I had been born in the same town, where his parents were leading citizens. He was younger than I, and had been among my students when I began to teach in our town.⁵⁰ He studied under me again at Carthage and held me in high esteem, because I seemed to him good and learned, while I for my part was fond of him on account of

46. See Ps 52:6(53:5).

47. See Ps 22(23):4.

48. See 1 Cor 1:31.

49. For Nebridius see IV,3,6 and Augustine's Letter 98,8. Alypius was with Augustine at the famous conversion scene, VIII,12,28-30, was converted with him, was with him at Cassiciacum and later became bishop of Thagaste.

50. That is, in 375/376, the year Augustine's other great friend died.

his great nobility of character, which was unmistakable even before he reached mature years. However, the whirlpool of Carthaginian immoral amusements sucked him in; it was aboil with frivolous shows, and he was ensnared in the madness of the circuses. At the time when he was being wretchedly tossed about in it, I as a professor of rhetoric had opened a school and was teaching publicly, but he did not attend my courses on account of a quarrel which had arisen between me and his father. I had discovered that he loved the circuses with a passion likely to be his undoing, and I was extremely anxious because he seemed to me bent on wasting his excellent promise, if indeed he had not already done so. I had, however, no opportunity to restrain him by any kind of pressure, either out of goodwill as a friend or by right as his teacher, for I presumed that his attitude to me was the same as his father's, though in fact he was not like that. Accordingly he disregarded his father's wishes and took to greeting me when we met; he also began to frequent my lecture hall, where he would listen awhile, then go away.

12. I did not tackle him about his reckless addiction to worthless shows, or attempt to save him from ruining his fine intelligence on them, because it slipped my memory; but you, Lord, guide the courses of all your creatures, and you had not forgotten this man who one day would be set over your children as dispenser of your mysteries. You brought about his correction through my agency, but without my knowledge, so that it might be clearly recognized as your work. One day when I was sitting in my usual place with my students around me he came, greeted me, sat down and applied his mind to the subject we were studying. I chanced to have a text in my hands, and while I was expounding it an apt comparison with the circuses occurred to me, which would drive home the point I was making more humorously and tellingly through caustic mockery of people enslaved by that craze. You know, our God, that I did not think at the time about curing Alypius of this bane. Yet he took my illustration to himself, believing that I had used it solely on his account; and what another person might have regarded as a reason for being angry with me this honest young man regarded rather as a reason for being angry with himself and loving me more ardently. Long ago you had told us, weaving the advice into your scriptures: *Offer correction to a wise man, and he will love you for it.*⁵¹ Yet I had not corrected him myself. You make use of all of us, witting or unwit-

51. Prv 9:8 (Old Latin).

ting, for just purposes known to you, and you made my heart and tongue into burning coals with which to cauterize a promising mind that was wasting away, and heal it.⁵²

If anyone is insensitive to your merciful dealings, let such a person silently withhold your praise, but from the marrow of my being those same dealings cry out in confession to you;⁵³ for after hearing my words he wrenched himself away from that pit in which he had been willfully sinking, and finding incredible pleasure in his blindness. With a strong resolve of temperance he shook his mind free, and all the filth of the circuses dropped away from him. Never again did he go there. Then he overcame his father's opposition to his taking me for his teacher; his father gave in and gave him leave.

Once he had begun to study with me again, he became entangled in the same superstition as I, for he loved the display of continence put up by the Manichees, believing it to be real and authentic. In fact it was insane and seductive. It captivated precious souls⁵⁴ who were still too ignorant to penetrate the depth of virtue and liable to be deceived by the superficial appearance of a virtue that was but feigned and faked.

8. 13. He had been drawn toward a worldly course by his parents' siren song, and he was unwilling to abandon it, so he had gone to Rome ahead of me to study law, and there he was assailed by an entirely unexpected craving for gladiatorial entertainments. This came about in a way no one could have foreseen. He shunned such displays and loathed them; but some of his friends and fellow-students, returning from their midday meal, happened to find the stadium open to them and, as is the way with close friends, drew him in by force, despite his vehement protests and struggles. It was one of the days for cruel and murderous sport, and he kept telling them, "You may drag my body into that place and fix me there, but can you direct my mind and my eyes to the show? I will be there, and yet be absent, and so get the better both of you and of the performance." They heard what he said but took him along with them all the same, wishing perhaps to know if he could make good his claim. When they arrived and settled themselves in what seats they could find, the whole place was

52. See Ps 139:11(140:10). In his *Exposition of Psalm 139*, 14 (compare *ibid.* 119,5) Augustine explains that burning is necessary to clear the ground, so that grace may build.

53. See Ps 106(107):8 and recurrently.

54. See Prv 6:26.

heaving with thoroughly brutal pleasure. He kept the gateways of his eyes closed, forbidding his mind to go out that way to such evils. If only he could have stopped his ears too! At a certain tense moment in the fight a huge roar from the entire crowd beat upon him. He was overwhelmed by curiosity, and on the excuse that he would be prepared to condemn and rise above whatever was happening even if he saw it, he opened his eyes, and suffered a more grievous wound in his soul than the gladiator he wished to see had received in the body. He fell more dreadfully than the other man whose fall had evoked the shouting; for by entering his ears and persuading his eyes to open the noise effected a breach through which his mind—a mind rash rather than strong, and all the weaker for presuming to trust in itself rather than in you, as it should have done⁵⁵—was struck and brought down. As he saw the blood he gulped the brutality along with it; he did not turn away but fixed his gaze there and drank in the frenzy, not aware of what he was doing, reveling in the wicked contest and intoxicated on sanguinary pleasure. No longer was he the man who had joined the crowd; he was now one of the crowd he had joined, and a genuine companion of those who had led him there. What more need be said? He watched, he shouted, he grew hot with excitement, he carried away with him a madness that lured him back again not only in the company of those by whom he had initially been dragged along but even before them, dragging others.

Nonetheless you rescued him from his plight with your mighty and most merciful hand, and taught him to rely not on himself but on you;⁵⁶ but this was long afterward.

9. 14. The foregoing episode was stored up in his memory and contributed to his future healing, as also did another. Once when he was still a student and attending my classes at Carthage, he was in the market-place at midday, thinking over the passage he had to declaim, as is customary in scholastic training. You allowed him to be arrested by the temple-guards as a thief; and I think, our God, that you did so for no other reason than to ensure that this youth, who was destined to be such a great man, should learn even at this early stage that in judicial hearings one person ought not to be condemned too easily through the rash gullibility of another.

55. See Jdt 6:15.

56. See Prv 3:5; Is 57:13.

This is what happened. He was walking up and down alone in front of the lawcourt with his tablets and pen when a certain young student (the real thief) secretly brought an axe and, without Alypius being aware of it, gained access to the leaden gratings over the part of the market assigned to the silversmiths, and began to hack away the lead. The silversmiths below heard the sound of the axe, and softly discussed what to do; then they sent men to arrest anyone they might find. Hearing their voices the thief fled, leaving the axe behind because he was afraid of being caught with it in his possession. But Alypius, who had not seen him go in, observed him come out and take to his heels, and, wishing to know the reason, went into the place, picked up the axe, and stood there holding it, considering the matter in some surprise. The men who had been sent came and found him, alone and holding the very tool which had alerted them by its noise. They seized him and dragged him off, boasting to a crowd of bystanders in the market-place that they had caught the thief red-handed. Then they led him away to stand trial.

15. But his lesson had gone far enough. You promptly came to the defense of his innocence, O Lord, you who were the sole witness of it.⁵⁷ As he was being led off either to imprisonment or to corporal punishment there chanced to meet them a certain architect who had prime responsibility for public buildings. The guards were glad that he in particular should have met them, because they were often suspected by him of having themselves stolen any items which were missing from the market-place, and now they thought that he would at last realize who had committed these thefts. However, this man had frequently seen Alypius at the house of a certain senator whom he used often to visit to pay his respects. He recognized him at once, took him by the hand and drew him aside from the throng, inquiring the reason for this calamity. When he heard what had happened, and heard all the bystanders making a commotion and uttering angry threats, he ordered Alypius to come away with him.

They arrived at the home of the youth who had committed the crime. At the gate was a youngster naive enough to blurt out the whole truth without worrying about the consequences for his master; and he was the slave who had been in attendance on his master in the market-place. Alypius remem-

57. See Wis 1:6; Jer 29:23.

bered this and told the architect, who showed the axe to the child and asked him whose it was. "Ours," he promptly replied, and on being questioned further revealed the rest of the story.

The case thus shifted to that household, and the crowds who had already begun to jeer at Alypius were balked, while the man who would one day be the dispenser of your word and the judge of many a case in your Church departed more experienced and better informed.

10. 16. I had caught up with him in Rome, and since a very strong bond of friendship kept him close to me, he set out for Milan in my company; for he did not want to leave me, and he also hoped to make some use of the legal expertise he had acquired, though this was in response to his parents' wishes rather than his own. Three times already he had acted as assessor, and aroused the amazement of others by his integrity, though for his part he found it still more amazing that they could value gold above honor.

His character was put to the test not only by the lure of covetousness but also by the sting of intimidation. In Rome he served as Assessor to the Chancellor of the Italian Treasury. Now there was at this time a certain very powerful senator who had placed many people under an obligation by his favors, and dominated others by instilling terror. He sought to gain permission for some course of action not permitted by the law, as his influence usually enabled him to do; but Alypius withheld him. A bribe was offered; Alypius laughed heartily. Threats were made, but he spurned them. Everyone marveled at the rare soul which neither sought to make a friend nor feared to make an enemy of this great man, who was widely famed for the innumerable means at his disposal either to do others a good turn or to harm them. The judge to whom Alypius stood as counsel had himself no wish to grant the petition but dared not openly refuse; he therefore threw the responsibility for the decision onto Alypius, alleging that he was prevented by his counsel from granting the request, though the truth was that if he had done so Alypius would have left the court.

Almost the only source of temptation for him lay in literary studies, for he had the opportunity to have books copied for his own use at palace prices; but after considering the claims of justice he changed his mind for the better, judging that equity, which forbade him so to act, had more to recommend it than the privilege of office, which enabled him to. This was a trifling matter, but anyone who is trustworthy in a small thing is trustworthy in a great one too, and that saying uttered by your Truth can never

be without force: *If you have not proved trustworthy over dishonest money, who will give you what is real? And if you have not been trustworthy over what belongs to another, who will give you any of your own?*⁵⁸

This is what he was like, this man so closely united with me, the friend who concurred with me as we debated the right way to live.

Nebridius

17. Nebridius too shared our aspirations and was tossed to and fro along with us, for he was an ardent fellow-seeker of the happy life and an exceedingly keen researcher into the most difficult questions. He had left behind his home territory near Carthage, left Carthage itself where he had spent most of his time, left his father's fine estate,⁵⁹ his home and his mother (who did not attempt to follow him), and come to Milan for no other purpose than to live with me and share in our fiercely burning zeal for truth and wisdom. So then there were three gaping mouths, three individuals in need, gasping out their hunger to one another and looking to you to give them their food in due time.⁶⁰ By your merciful providence our worldly behavior always brought bitter disappointments, but whenever we sought to discern the reason why we should suffer them, we met with only darkness. So we would turn away, moaning, "How long are we to go on like this?" We were perpetually asking this question, but even as we asked it we made no attempt to change our ways, because we had no light to see what we should grasp instead, if we were to let go of them.

Perplexities and plans: philosophy and the problem of continence

11. 18. For my own part I was reflecting with anxiety and some perplexity how much time had elapsed since my nineteenth year, when I had first been fired with passion for the pursuit of wisdom, resolving that once I had found it I would leave behind all empty hopes and vain desires and the follies that deluded me.⁶¹ Yet here I was in my thirtieth year

58. Lk 16:11-12.

59. See Horace, *Epodi* II,3; Mt 19:29.

60. See Pss 103(104):27; 144(145):15.

61. See Ps 39:5(40:4).

sticking fast in the same muddy bog⁶² through my craving to enjoy the good things of the present moment, which eluded and dissipated me. "Tomorrow," I had been saying to myself, "tomorrow I will find it; it will appear plainly and I will grasp it....

"Faustus will be coming and he will explain everything....

"Fine fellows, you Academics! So nothing that we need for living our lives can be known with certainty? Nonsense! Let us seek energetically and not give up hope. The passages which used to seem ridiculous in the Church's holy books are not so ridiculous after all, but can be understood in a different and quite acceptable way. I will plant my feet on that step where my parents put me as a child, until self-evident truth comes to light.

"But where is it to be sought? When, even? Ambrose is not available and we have no time to read. Where are we even to look for the right books? Where and when are we to buy them? From whom borrow them?

"Let us plan our day and reserve definite periods of time in the interest of our souls' salvation. A great hope has dawned, for the Catholic faith does not teach what we thought it did when we found fault with it in our vanity; its learned exponents reject as impious any suggestion that God is confined within the shape of a human body. Can we, then, hesitate to knock⁶³ where other truths may be opened? Our pupils occupy our morning hours, but what are we doing with the rest? Why do we not get on with it?

"Ah, but in that case, when are we to pay court to our important friends, whose patronage we need? When prepare the lessons we sell to our students? When refresh ourselves and relax our minds from concentrating on these problems?

19. "Devil take the lot of them; let us get rid of all these empty, meaningless occupations and devote ourselves solely to the quest for truth. Life is a wretched business and death unpredictable; suppose it takes us by surprise: in what condition shall we depart? Where shall we then have the chance to learn what we have neglected here? Shall we not rather suffer punishment for our negligence?

"But what if death cuts off all anxious searching, along with the power of thought itself, and puts an end to it all? Perhaps we should consider that?

62. See Terence, *Phormio* 780.

63. See Mt 7:7-8.

"No, perish the thought! It cannot be so. It is not meaningless, not without purpose, that the eminent and lofty authority of the Christian faith is spread throughout the world. Such great and wonderful provision would not have been made for us from above if bodily death meant the destruction of the soul's life as well. Why are we so slow, then, to abandon worldly ambition and apply ourselves singlemindedly to the search for God and a life of happiness?"

"Wait a little, for those things are very pleasant too; they hold no slight sweetness. We should not be too ready to shrug them off, for to return to them later would be ignoble. Consider what a fine thing it is for a person to win a reputation. What prize could be more desirable? We have plenty of influential friends: without setting our sights unduly high, one may expect at least a governorship to come one's way. And one might marry a wife who is reasonably well off, and so will not be a heavy expense, and let this be the limit of one's ambitions. Many great men have been dedicated to the pursuit of wisdom in company with their wives, and one would do well to imitate them."

20. All the while, as I talked to myself like this and the wind blew now from this quarter, now from that, hurling my heart hither and thither, time was slipping by. I put off being *converted to the Lord* and from day to day⁶⁴ pushed away from me the day when I would live in you, though I could not postpone a daily dying in myself. Though I was so enamored of a happy life I feared to find it in its true home, and fled from it even as I sought it. For I thought I would be exceedingly miserable if deprived of a woman's embrace, and gave no thought to the medicine prepared by your mercy for the healing of this infirmity,⁶⁵ since I had no experience of it and believed that continence must be achieved by one's own strength, a strength of which I was not conscious in my own case. I was too stupid to realize that, as scripture testifies,⁶⁶ no one can be continent except by your gift. Yet you would certainly have given me the gift if I had beaten⁶⁷ upon your ears with my inward groans and cast my care upon you⁶⁸ with resolute faith.

21. Alypius, however, dissuaded me from taking a wife. He repeatedly played on the fact that once I had done so it would be impossible for

64. See Sir 5:8.

65. See Ps 102(103):3; Mt 4:23.

66. See Wis 8:21.

67. See Mt 7:7.

68. See Ps 54:23(55:22).

us to live together in carefree leisure and devote ourselves to philosophy as we had long desired, and still desired, to do. With regard to this matter he was himself, even now as a grown man, thoroughly chaste, indeed remarkably so, perhaps because he had had an initial experience of sexual intercourse in early adolescence, but had not continued in it; he had been hurt and had felt ashamed, and thereafter lived in complete continence. I opposed his view, reminding him of the examples of people who, though married, had cultivated wisdom and found favor with God,⁶⁹ and had faithfully kept their friends and loved them dearly. Not that I could myself match their nobility of mind: I was shackled by weakness of the flesh and was dragging along with me a chain forged of deadly sweetness, fearing to be freed from it and beating away his words of sound advice as though from a touchy wound, for that advice was a hand that might have set me free. Worse still, the serpent⁷⁰ was speaking through me even to Alypius, attempting to bind him too and using my tongue to scatter sweet snares in his path⁷¹ to trap those honorable, nimble feet.

22. He was in no sense overcome by lust for pleasure like mine; what lured him toward a tentative desire for marriage was curiosity. It came about like this. He looked on with astonishment that I, for whom he had no small regard, was so deeply mired in the sticky morass of sensual pleasure that whenever the subject came up for discussion between us I declared that I was utterly incapable of living a celibate life, and defended myself in the face of his obvious astonishment by pointing out the vast difference between that hasty, furtive experience of his, which by now he scarcely remembered and could therefore easily disdain with no trouble at all, and the delights of my habitual way of life. If only the honorable name of matrimony were conferred upon these pleasures, I told him, he would have no right to be astonished that I felt unable to despise the way I lived. He replied that he was most interested to know what this element was, without which my life, which to him appeared so attractive, would be to me a punishment. His mind, free from that fetter, was amazed at my servitude, and through amazement was drawn toward a hankering to experience it. He might have found his way into the same experience and perhaps have fallen from there into the very servitude which had provoked his amaze-

69. See Heb 13:16.

70. See Gn 3:1.

71. See Ps 141:4(142:3).

ment, for what he was bent upon was a pact with death,⁷² and anyone who falls in love with danger will fall into it.⁷³ Neither of us considered, except feebly, what the glory of wedlock could be in terms of guiding the course of a marriage and bringing up children. It was my habitual attempt to sate an insatiable concupiscence that for the most part savagely tormented me and held me captive, while for him it was wonder that dragged him along toward captivity.

Such was our condition until you, O Most High, who forsake not our clay,⁷⁴ mercifully came to aid our misery in marvelous, hidden ways.

Projected marriage

13. 23. Insistent pressure was on me to marry a wife. Already I was asking for it myself, and a marriage was being arranged for me, thanks especially to my mother's efforts. She expected to see me washed in the saving waters of baptism after marriage, and she rejoiced to see me being daily shaped toward this end, observing that her prayers were beginning to be answered and your promises with regard to my faith fulfilled. In the light of my request and her own desire she besought you daily, with powerful, heartfelt cry, to show her in a vision something of my future marriage; but you never consented. She did have some illusory, fantastic dreams, brought on by the activity of her own human spirit as she busied herself about this matter, and these she related to me, but without the confidence she usually showed when you revealed something to her: to these dreams she attached little importance. She claimed that by something akin to the sense of taste, a faculty she could not explain in words, she was able to distinguish between your revelations to her and the fantasies of her own dreaming soul.

All the same, the pressure on me was kept up, and an offer for a certain girl was made on my behalf; but she was about two years below marriageable age.⁷⁵ I liked her, though, so we decided to wait.

72. See Wis 1:16; Is 28:18.

73. See Sir 3:27.

74. See Gn 2:7.

75. According to Justinian's Code (*Inst.* 1,22) girls could marry at twelve.

Dream of an ideal community

14. 24. Many of my friends and I were greatly exercised in mind as we talked together and shared our loathing of the annoying upheavals inseparable from human life; and we almost made up our minds to live a life of leisure,⁷⁶ far removed from the crowds. We would set up this place of leisurely retirement in such a way that any possessions we might have would be made available to the community and we would pool our resources in a single fund. The sincerity of our friendship should ensure that this thing should not belong to one person and that to another: there would be one single property formed out of many; the whole would belong to each of us, and all things would belong to all. It seemed to us that about ten people would be able to live like this in the same community and that there would be some exceptionally rich men among us, particularly our fellow-townsman Romanianus; he had been very well known to me since childhood and had now been drawn to the court by the serious complexities of his business affairs. He was the most enthusiastic of all for this project, and his persuasion carried special weight inasmuch as he was far more wealthy than the rest.⁷⁷ We agreed that two of us should be appointed as officials each year to see to necessary provisions, so that the others could be undisturbed.⁷⁸

But some of us were already married and others hoped to be, and as soon as we began to consider whether our womenfolk⁷⁹ would consent to these arrangements the whole elaborate plan fell apart, came to pieces in our hands and had to be discarded. The sequel was sighs and groans and the redirection of our steps into the broad paths of the world,⁸⁰ because though our hearts were full of schemes, your design lasts for ever.⁸¹ In the light of that design of yours you laughed at our plans while preparing your own, for you meant to give us our food in due time; you were to open your hand and fill our souls with your blessing.⁸²

76. The ideal of *otium*, leisure, for the educated of the ancient world implied studious devotion to philosophy, literature, or the arts.

77. Romanianus of Thagaste, Augustine's financial benefactor, a Manichee, whom Augustine later attempted to lead to baptism.

78. Pythagorean, as well as Christian, models have been suggested as the inspiration for this commune. The scheme fell apart immediately, as Augustine goes on to relate, but was to some extent realized later at Cassiciacum; see IX,3.5.

79. *Mulierculae*, diminutive, as in I,6,10: possibly an ironic comment by Augustine on the fragility of the scheme.

80. See Mt 7:13.

81. See Prv 19:21; Ps 32(33):11.

82. See Ps 144(145):15-16.

Dismissal of Augustine's common-law wife; his grief

15. 25. Meanwhile my sins were multiplying,⁸³ for the woman with whom I had been cohabiting was ripped from my side, being regarded as an obstacle to my marriage. So deeply was she engrafted into my heart that it was left torn and wounded and trailing blood.⁸⁴ She had returned to Africa, vowing to you that she would never give herself to another man, and the son I had fathered by her was left with me. But I was too unhappy to follow a woman's example: I faced two years of waiting before I could marry the girl to whom I was betrothed, and I chafed at the delay, for I was no lover of marriage but the slave of lust. So I got myself another woman, in no sense a wife, that my soul's malady might be sustained in its pristine vigor or even aggravated, as it was conducted under the escort of inveterate custom into the realm of matrimony.

The wound inflicted on me by the earlier separation did not heal either. After the fever and the immediate acute pain had dulled, it putrefied, and the pain became a cold despair.

16. 26. Praise be to you, glory be to you,⁸⁵ O fount of all mercy! As I grew more and more miserable, you were drawing nearer. Already your right hand was ready to seize me and pull me out of the filth,⁸⁶ yet I did not know it. The only thing that restrained me from being sucked still deeper into the whirlpool of carnal lusts was the fear of death and of your future judgment, which throughout all the swings of opinion had never been dislodged from my heart. With my friends Alypius and Nebridius I argued about the fate of the good and the wicked: I maintained that, as I saw it, Epicurus would have won the debate had I not believed that after death life remains for the soul, and so do the consequences of our moral actions; this Epicurus refused to believe. I posed this question: if we were immortal, and lived in a state of perpetual bodily pleasure without any fear of losing it, why

83. See Sir 23:3.

84. It had been a faithful common-law marriage and had lasted about fourteen years. Such unions were considered normal and acceptable by Augustine's contemporaries and even countenanced (for the unmarried) by the Church: see Council of Toledo (400), canon 17. Augustine considered this situation himself in *The Excellence of Marriage* 5,5, written a few years later than *The Confessions*, and held that it approximated to true marriage. He was probably under pressure from Monica, and possibly from Ambrose, to break it off, but commentators tend to judge him severely.

85. See 1 Chr 29:11-12.

86. Or, reading *ablutura* with some manuscripts instead of *ablatura*, "to pull me out of the filth and wash me clean," that is, by baptism.

should we not be happy? Would there be anything else to seek?⁸⁷ I did not know that it was symptomatic of my vast misery that I had sunk so low, and was so blind, as to be incapable of even conceiving the light of a goodness, a beauty, which deserved to be embraced for its own sake, which the bodily eye sees not, though it is seen by the spirit within. Nor did I in my wretchedness consider what stream it was whence flowed to me the power to discuss even these distasteful things with my friends and still find sweetness in our talk, or whence came my inability to be happy, even in the sense in which I then understood happiness, without my friends, however lavishly supplied I might be with carnal luxuries. I loved these friends for their own sake, and felt myself loved by them for mine.

Oh, how tortuous were those paths! Woe betide the soul which supposes it will find something better if it forsakes you! Toss and turn as we may, now on our back, now side, now belly—our bed is hard at every point, for you alone are our rest.⁸⁸ But lo! Here you are;⁸⁹ you rescue us from our wretched meanderings and establish us on your way;⁹⁰ you console us and bid us, "Run;⁹¹ I will carry you, I will lead you and I will bring you home."⁹²

87. This doctrine of Epicurus is set out in Cicero, *De finibus* I,12,40.

88. Augustine's favorite theme of restlessness and rest in God is here given special poignancy by the evocation of insomnia.

89. See Ps 138(139):8.

90. See Pss 31(32):8; 85(86):11.

91. See 1 Cor 9:24.

92. See Is 46:4.

Book VII

Neo-Platonism Frees Augustine's Mind

1, 1. By now my misspent, impious adolescence was dead, and I was entering the period of youth,¹ but as I advanced in age I sank ignobly into foolishness, for I was unable to grasp the idea of substance except as something we can see with our bodily eyes. I was no longer representing you to myself in the shape of a human body, O God, for since beginning to acquire some inkling of philosophy I always shunned this illusion, and now I was rejoicing to find a different view in the belief of our spiritual mother, your Catholic Church. Yet no alternative way of thinking about you had occurred to me; and here was I, a mere human, and a sinful one at that, striving to comprehend you, the supreme, sole, true God.²

Materialistic notions of God insufficient

From the core of my being I believed you to be imperishable, inviolable and unchangeable, because although I did not understand why or how this could be, I saw quite plainly and with full conviction that anything perishable is inferior to what is imperishable, and I unhesitatingly reckoned the inviolable higher than anything subject to violation, and what is constant and unchanging better than what can be changed.³ My heart cried out in vehement protest against all the phantom shapes that thronged my imagination, and I strove with this single weapon to beat away from the gaze of

1. *Iuventus* is associated in Augustine's mind with Milan. *Adolescentia* lasted from 15 to 30.

2. See Jn 17:3.

3. The immutability of God was a key idea for Augustine, as becomes clear especially in this book.

my mind the cloud of filth that hovered round me,⁴ but hardly had I got rid of it than in another twinkling of an eye⁵ it was back again, clotted together, invading and clogging my vision, so that even though I was no longer hampered by the image of a human body, I was still forced to imagine something corporeal spread out in space, whether infused into the world or even diffused through the infinity outside it. This was still the case even though I recognized that this substance was imperishable, inviolable and immutable (necessarily so, being superior to anything perishable, subject to violation or changeable); because anything to which I must deny these spatial dimensions seemed to me to be nothing at all, absolutely nothing, not even a void such as might be left if every kind of body—earthly, watery, aerial or heavenly—were removed from it, for though such a place would be a nothingness, it would still have the quality of space.

2. Whatever was not stretched out in space, or diffused or compacted or inflated or possessed of some such qualities, or at least capable of possessing them, I judged to be nothing at all. Yet in so thinking I was gross of heart⁶ and not even luminous to myself; for as my eyes were accustomed to roam among material forms, so did my mind among the images of them, yet I could not see that this very act of perception, whereby I formed those images, was different from them in kind. Yet my mind would never have been able to form them unless it was itself a reality, and a great one.

Hence I thought that even you, Life of my life, were a vast reality spread throughout space in every direction: I thought that you penetrated the whole mass of the earth and the immense, unbounded spaces beyond it on all sides, that earth, sky and all things were full of you, and that they found their limits in you, while you yourself had no limit anywhere. Since material air—I mean the atmosphere above the earth—posed no barrier to the sun's light, which was able to penetrate and pass through it, filling it entirely without bursting it apart or tearing it, I assumed that not only the material sky, air and sea, but even the material earth, were similarly traversable by you, penetrable and open in all their greatest and tiniest

4. See Virgil, *Aeneid* III, 233, of the Harpies who harassed the Trojan refugees.

5. See 1 Cor 15:52.

6. See Mt 13:15; Acts 28:27.

parts to your presence, which secretly breathes through them within and without, controlling all that you have made.

I held this view only because I was unable to think in any other way; it was false, because on that showing a larger part of the earth would contain a larger portion of you, and a smaller a lesser portion, and all things would be full of you in such a way that an elephant's body would contain a larger amount of you than a sparrow's, because it is bigger and takes up more space. You would be distributed piecemeal throughout the elements of the world, with greater parts of yourself present where there is plenty of room, and smaller parts in more cramped places. Obviously this is not the case. You had not yet illumined my darkness.⁷

2. 3. I had a sufficient argument, Lord, against those self-deceived deceivers⁸ who, though so talkative, were dumb because your word did not sound forth from them. Yes, I had a sufficient argument, one which Nebridius had been wont to propose ever since our days in Carthage, which left us all shaken who heard it. Those so-called powers of darkness, whom they always postulate as a horde deployed in opposition to you: what would they have done to you if you had refused to fight? If the reply is that they could have inflicted some injury on you, it would imply that you are subject to violation and therefore destructible. If, on the other hand, it is denied that they had power to injure you, there would have been no point in fighting.⁹ Yet the fighting is alleged to have been so intense that some portion of yourself, a limb perhaps, or an offspring of your very substance, became entangled with hostile powers and with the natures of beings not created by you, and was by them so far corrupted and changed for the worse that its beatitude was turned to misery, and it could be rescued and purified only with help; and this portion is supposed to be the soul, enslaved, defiled, corrupt, and in need of aid from your Word, which must necessarily be free, pure and unscathed if it is to help, and yet, since it is of the same nature as the soul, must be equally corrupt itself!

7. See Ps 17:29(18:28).

8. The Manichees.

9. The battle between light and darkness was a primary postulate of the Manichees. In the fight some portion of the light-realm had been trapped in matter and darkness; it pervaded all nature but found its highest manifestation in the human soul. The contradiction in which the Manichees thereby involved themselves, spelled out by Augustine here, was used by him in a public disputation with the Manichee Felix, who recanted.

It follows that if they admitted that, whatever you are, you are incorruptible (your substance, that is, by which you exist), this whole rigmarole would be shown up as untrue and to be rejected with loathing; but if they alleged that you are corruptible, their position would already be false and no sooner stated than be condemned. The foregoing argument was therefore quite sufficient, and I ought to have squeezed these people from my gullet and vomited them out, for no escape was left them from the horrible sacrilege of heart and tongue they were committing by thinking and speaking of you in this fashion.

The problem of evil

3. 4. I declared and firmly believed that you, our God, our true God, who made not only our souls but our bodies too, and not only our souls and bodies but people everywhere and all things, are subject to no defilement or alteration, and are in all respects unchangeable; yet even so I was still convinced that the cause of evil had not been clarified or disentangled. Nonetheless I saw that, whatever it might be, I must beware of looking for it in such a way as to be forced into believing that the immutable God was changeable, lest I become myself the very thing I was trying to trace. Accordingly I conducted my search without anxiety, certain that those whom I now wholeheartedly shunned were not speaking the truth, because I saw that through their inquiry into the origin of evil they had waxed full of malice,¹⁰ more ready to claim that your substance was vulnerable to evil than that their own perpetrated it.

5. I strained to see for myself the truth of an explanation I had heard: that the cause of evil is the free decision of our will, in consequence of which we act wrongly and suffer your righteous judgment; but I could not see it clearly. I struggled to raise my mental gaze from the depths, but sank back again; I strove repeatedly, but again and again sank back. I was as sure of having a will as I was of being alive, and this it was that lifted me into your light. When I wanted something, or did not want it, I was absolutely certain that no one else but I was wanting or not wanting it, and I was beginning to perceive that the root of my sin lay there. Any involuntary act I regarded as something I suffered rather than as something I did, and I

10. See Sir 9:3; Rom 1:29.

judged it to be a penalty rather than a fault, being quick to acknowledge that I was not unjustly punished in this way, since I held you to be just. But then I was forced to ask further, "Who made me? Was it not my God, who is not merely good, but Goodness itself? Whence, then, did I derive this ability to will evil and refuse good? Is it in me simply so that I should deserve the punishment I suffer? Who established that ability in me, who planted in me this bitter cutting,¹¹ when my whole being is from my most sweet God? If the devil is responsible, where did the devil come from? If he was a good angel who was transformed into a devil by his own perverted will, what was the origin of this evil will in him that turned him into a devil, when an angel is made entirely by the supremely good creator?"¹²

I was pushed down again by these thoughts and nearly choked; but never was I sucked into that pit of error where no one confesses to you, because people would rather hold that you suffer evil than that we commit it.

4. 6. My efforts were directed toward discovering more of the truth, on the basis of the discovery already made that what is indestructible is better than anything liable to be destroyed. Accordingly I confessed that, whatever you might be, you must be indestructible. No intelligence has ever conceived of anything better than you, or ever will, for you are the supreme and all-surpassing good; but since the indestructible is most truly and certainly to be esteemed above what is destructible, as I already knew, it followed that you must be indestructible, because otherwise my mind would have been able to attain something better than my God.

From this point, then, where I saw that the indestructible must be superior to what can be destroyed, I should have begun my inquiry by trying to understand where evil resides: that is, whence springs the corruption to which your nature is totally immune. For corruption can touch our God in no way whatever: neither by will, nor by necessity, nor by any unexpected misfortune. He is God, and what he wishes for himself is good, and he is himself the very nature of goodness, whereas to be corrupted is not good. Nor are you forced unwillingly into anything, because your will is not greater than your power: it could be greater only if you were greater than

11. See Heb 12:15.

12. Augustine will examine this question again in *The City of God* XII:1-9, but will find it insoluble.

yourself, for God's will and God's power are identical with God himself. And what unexpected chance can overtake you, who know everything? No nature exists, except because you know it. What need is there to prove at length why that substance which is God cannot be corruptible? If it were, it would not be God.

5. 7. So I was seeking the origin of evil, but seeking in an evil way, and failing to see the evil inherent in my search itself. I conjured up before my mind's eye¹³ the whole of creation: all the things in it that we can see, such as earth and sea and stars and trees and living things that are mortal, and all that we do not see in it, such as the heavenly firmament overhead and all the angels and all its spiritual inhabitants; and my imagination gave form to them also, and arranged them in their due places as though they had been corporeal. And I envisaged your creation as one huge mass in which all were arrayed according to bodily kinds, both those things which were really bodily in nature and the bodies I had myself attributed to spirits. I pictured it as enormous, not of such size as it really was, of course, for that I could not know, but as large as my fancy stretched, yet finite on all sides. I imagined you, Lord, who are infinite in every possible respect, surrounding and penetrating it in its every part, like a sea extending in all directions through immense space, a single unlimited sea which held within itself a sponge as vast as one could imagine but still finite, and the sponge soaked in every fibre of itself by the boundless sea.¹⁴

This was how I pictured your creation filled with your infinite being, and I reflected, "Look, this is God, and these are the things God has created. God is good, and though he is far more wonderful than they in every respect, still he who is good has created them good; see too how he surrounds and pervades them. Where, then, is evil; where does it come from and how did it creep in? What is its root, its seed? Or does it not exist at all? But in that case, why do we fear and avoid something that has no reality? If we say that our fear is meaningless, then the fear itself is undeniably evil, for it goads and tortures our heart to no purpose, and so the evil is all the greater inasmuch as the object of our fear is non-existent, yet we fear all the same. Either the evil we fear exists, or our fear itself is the evil.

13. See Ps 15(16):8.

14. Plotinus has a similar image in *Enneads* IV,3,9.

So where does it come from, if the good God made all things good?¹⁵ He is the greater good, to be sure, the supreme good, and the things he has made are lesser goods; nonetheless creator and creatures are all good. Whence, then, comes evil? Was something bad in the material he used, so that though he formed it and disposed it in order¹⁶ he left in it some element that was not turned to good? But why? Did he lack the power so to convert and change it all that no evil would remain, he who is omnipotent? In any case, why would he have chosen to use it for making things, rather than using this same almighty power to destroy it entirely? Or could it have existed against his will? Or again, if matter was eternal, why did he allow it to exist so long, from infinite ages past, and then at last decide to make things out of it? Or, if he suddenly decided to act, surely he, being almighty, could have acted in such a way that it should cease to be, and he alone should exist, he, the complete, true, supreme, infinite Good? Or, supposing that it was unseemly for him who is good not to fashion and build something good as well, ought he not to have done away with all the bad material and destroyed it, and himself originated some good matter instead, which he could use to create everything? If he were able to construct good things only with the help of material he had not himself constructed, he would not be omnipotent."

Such thoughts as these was I turning over in my miserable soul, weighed down as it was by the gnawing anxieties that flowed from my fear that death might overtake me before I had found the truth. Faith in your Christ, our Lord and Savior, as I found it in the Catholic Church, still persisted steadfastly in my heart, though it was a faith still in many ways unformed, wavering and at variance with the norm of her teaching. Yet my mind did not abandon it, but drank it in ever more deeply as the days passed.

He finally rejects astrology

6. 8. It was some time since I had rejected the misleading divinations and impious ravings of astrologers. On this score too let your merciful dealings themselves sing praise to you from the innermost depths of my

15. See Gn 1:31.

16. *Fecit ... formavit atque ordinavit*: probably a trinitarian pattern.

soul.¹⁷ O my God! In my obstinacy you took care of me by providing¹⁸ me with a friend: you it was, you and no other, for who else calls us back from our every death-dealing error but the Life that cannot die, the Wisdom who enlightens our needy minds but needs no borrowed light itself, the Wisdom who governs the whole world, even to the fluttering leaves on the trees? Obstinate indeed had I struggled against the shrewd old man, Vindicianus,¹⁹ and against Nebridius, a youth of wonderful insight. The former had declared with emphasis, the latter admittedly with more hesitation, but frequently, that the art of foretelling the future is bogus, that human guesswork is often lucky, and that when people talk a great deal many truths about future events are likely to be uttered, not because the speakers know but because they stumble upon them by not keeping their mouths shut. So you provided for me a friend who was keen to consult astrologers, but not well versed in their lore. Having sought answers from them out of curiosity, as I have indicated, he already knew a certain amount, which he had heard, he said, from his father. Little did he know how efficacious it was to prove in giving the lie to that superstition.

His name was Firminus. He had been educated in the liberal arts and was a well-spoken man, and since he regarded me as a dear friend he consulted me about certain of his business affairs of which he had high hopes, inquiring how I interpreted his birth horoscope, as they call it. Now I was already inclined toward Nebridius' view of the practice; however, I did not refuse to offer an interpretation or say what came into my mind, doubtful though I was; but I remarked that I was almost persuaded that divination was absurd and meaningless.

Then he told me that his father had been an avid student of books dealing with such matters, and had had a friend who was equally a devotee. As the two men collaborated in research and discussion they became more and more ardently enthusiastic for this nonsense. If even dumb animals in their households were due to produce young, these men would record the exact moments of birth and note the position of the stars at the time, on the pretext of collecting experimental data for what claimed to be a science. Firminus went on to say that he had heard his father tell

17. See Ps 106 (107):8 and recurrently.

18. *Procurasti*: this friend Firminus was "procured" for Augustine by God, as the "books of the Platonists" will be in VII,9,13.

19. See IV,3,5.

how, when his mother was pregnant with him, Firminus, a certain slave-girl in the house of his father's friend was expecting a baby at the same time. This fact could not escape the girl's master, who took the utmost care to calculate even the whelping-times of his dogs. So while one man was observing and counting with meticulous precision the days, hours and smaller fractions of hours in his wife's case, the other was doing the same in respect of his maid-servant.

The two women gave birth simultaneously, forcing them to assign exactly the same horoscope, even in the finest detail, to both babies, the one to his son, the other to his slave. It happened like this. As the women went into labor the two friends sent word to each other to let each know what was happening at the other's house, and held messengers in readiness who would announce to each the birth of the child as soon as it occurred. It was easy for them to arrange for instantaneous announcement, since each was master in his own domain. So, Firminus related, the two sets of messengers were dispatched, and met at a point exactly halfway between the two houses, which meant that neither of the friends could assign a different position of the stars, or record any different moment of time. Yet Firminus was born in easy circumstances among his own relatives, and pursued quite a brilliant career in the world²⁰ making money and advancing in rank, while that slave-boy went on serving his masters, with no alleviation whatever of the yoke his status imposed on him. Firminus, who knew him, testified to the fact.

9. As soon as I heard this story, which, in view of the narrator's character, I believed, my obstinate resistance was completely overcome and dropped away. I attempted first of all to rescue Firminus himself from his curiosity about the occult by pointing out to him that if, after inspecting his birth horoscope, I had to make a prediction that accorded with the facts, I would have to say that I read in it that his parents were of excellent standing among his kinsfolk, that his family was a noble one in his home town, and that having been born a gentleman he would receive a good education in the liberal arts; whereas if the slave had consulted me about the indications of his birth horoscope—and his had been precisely the same—I would have to say, if my answer were to match reality, that what I saw in it was a family of the lowest class, a servile status, and all the rest of

20. Or "pursued a career along the world's highways," literally "whitened roads," possibly an allusion to the white surface on Roman roads, where chalk was used.

those very different conditions which marked off his lot from the other man's. The realization that after inspecting the same data I would either have to make divergent predictions in order to give a true answer, or else make the same prediction in the two cases and thereby speak falsely, was to me most certain evidence that when true predictions were offered by diviners who studied horoscopes, such things were the product of luck, not skill; but when false predictions were made, they resulted not from the practitioner's lack of skill, but from his luck letting him down.²¹

10. Approaching the subject from this aspect and pondering these points, I now turned my attention to the case of twins. I hoped to attack and refute and make a laughing-stock of the demented people who make a living by astrology, and I wanted to make sure that none of them would be in a position to retort that either Firminus had lied to me or his father had lied to him. At the birth of twins, then, it usually happens that both are delivered from the womb with only a short interval of time between them; and however great the influence this space of time may be alleged to have in the course of nature, it cannot be measured by human observation and certainly cannot be registered in the charts which an astrologer will later study with a view to making a true forecast. And true it will not be, because anyone who had examined the one same birth horoscope that applied to Esau and Jacob would have been obliged to foretell the same fate for both of them, whereas in fact their destinies were different. The astrologer would therefore have been wrong; or, if he spoke truly and foretold different things for each, he would have done so on the basis of the same data. He could speak the truth only by chance, then, not by skill.

For in truth it is you, Lord, who are at work, you, the supremely just ruler of the universe, though those who consult astrologers and those who are consulted know it not. By your secret inspiration you make each inquirer hear what befits him, as your unfathomable judgment shall justly assess our souls' secret deserving. Let no human being challenge you, "What is this?" or "Why that?" Let him not ask; no, let him not ask, for he is but human.

21. See IV,3,5.

Still searching

7. 11. So it was that you, my helper,²² had already freed me from those bonds, but I was still trying to trace the cause of evil, and found no way out of the difficulty. Yet you allowed no flood of thoughts to sweep me away from the faith whereby I believed that you exist, that your essence is unchangeable, that you care for us humans and judge our deeds, and that in your Son, Christ our Lord, and in the holy scriptures which the authority of your Catholic Church guarantees, you have laid down the way for human beings to reach that eternal life²³ which awaits us after death. These beliefs were unaffected, and persisted strong and unshaken in me as I feverishly searched for the origin of evil.

What agonizing birth-pangs tore my heart, what groans it uttered, O my God! And there, unknown to me, were your hearkening ears, for as I labored hard in my silent search the mute sufferings of my mind reached your mercy as loud cries. You alone knew my pain, no one else; for how little of it could I express in words to my closest friends! Could their ears have caught all the tumult that raged in my soul, when even I had neither time enough nor eloquence to articulate it? Yet even as my heart roared its anguish my clamor found its way to your hearing, and all my longing lay before you, for the light of my eyes was not there at my command:²⁴ it was within, but I was outside;²⁵ it occupied no place, but I had fixed my gaze on spatially positioned things, and so I found in them nowhere to rest. Nor did they welcome me or afford me the chance to say, "This is enough, now all is well," nor did they even release me to return to where I could well have found what was enough. I was nobler than they, but lowlier than you; and as long as I was subject to you my true joy was your very self, and you had subjected to me all those things which you created below me. The happy mean, the central region²⁶ where I would find salvation, was to preserve your image in me, serving you and subduing my body; but because I was rearing up against you in my pride, charging head-high against the Lord and crassly presuming on my own strength,²⁷ even those inferior things gained the upper hand and pressed me down, so that nowhere could I

22. See Pss 17:3(18:2); 29:11(30:10); 58:18(59:17); 62:8(63:7).

23. *Viam ... vitam*, both titles of Christ; see Jn 14:6. Allusions to "the Way," implicitly Christ, are frequent in this book.

24. See Ps 37:9-11(38:8-10).

25. See X,27,38; the language is reminiscent of Porphyry.

26. In this central position the soul was poised between God and creatures. In XIII,9,10 Augustine will develop the idea that love is a weight that drags it up or down.

27. See Jb 15:26 (Old Latin).

find respite or relief. When I looked outward they crowded upon me thick and fast; when I tried to think the images of these material things blocked my path of return, as though demanding, "Where are you off to, you unworthy, degraded fellow?" All this had sprung from my wounded condition, for you humbled this proud man with a wounding blow.²⁸ My swollen pride got in the way and kept me from you, and my face was so puffy that my eyes were closed.

8. 12. But you, Lord, abide for ever²⁹ and will not for ever be angry with us,³⁰ for you have taken pity on us who are earth and ashes,³¹ and so it was pleasing in your sight³² to give new form to my deformity.³³ You goaded me within³⁴ to make me chafe impatiently until you should grow clear to my spiritual sight. At the unseen touch of your medicine³⁵ my swelling subsided, while under the stinging eye-salve³⁶ of curative pain the fretful, darkened vision of my spirit began to improve day by day.

He reads "the books of the Platonists"

9. 13. You wanted to show me first and foremost how you thwart the proud but give grace to the humble,³⁷ and with what immense mercy on your part the way of humility was demonstrated to us when your Word was made flesh and dwelt among men and women;³⁸ and so through a certain man grossly swollen with pride you provided me³⁹ with some books by the Platonists, translated from the Greek into Latin.⁴⁰ In them I read (not that the same words were used, but precisely the same doctrine was taught, buttressed by many and various argu-

28. See Ps 88:11(89:10).

29. See Ps 101:13(102:12).

30. See Pss 84:6(85:5); 102(103):9.

31. See Jb 42:6; Sir 17:31.

32. See Ps 18:15(19:14); Dn 3:40.

33. See X,27, 38; I,7,12, the special work of the second person of the Trinity.

34. See Virgil, *Aeneid* XI,337; Eccl 12:11; Acts 9:5.

35. That is, Christ. At IX,13,35 Augustine speaks of the medicine that hung on the cross, and at IX,8,18 of the medicine that watches over us.

36. See Rv 3:18. Augustine uses this word *collyrium* of the incarnate Christ in his *Homilies on the Gospel of John* 2, 16, and elsewhere.

37. See Prv 3:34; Jas 4:6; 1 Pt 5:5.

38. See Jn 1:14.

39. *Procurasti* as in VII,6,8.

40. The translator was Marius Victorinus. It may be significant that Augustine does not identify them more precisely, but commentators have not left it at that. He certainly knew some of Plotinus' treatises; probably he read some Porphyry at Milan, perhaps in the form of maxims. In *The City of God* VIII,12 he mentions Plotinus, Iamblichus, Porphyry, and Apuleius Afer as "very noble." He would in any case have imbibed some Neo-Platonism from Ambrose's teaching, to which he continued to listen, and from educated friends.

ments) that *in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God; he was God. He was with God in the beginning. Everything was made through him; nothing came to be without him. What was made is alive with his life, and that life was the light of humankind. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never been able to master it;* and that the human soul, even though it bears *testimony about the Light,* is not itself the Light, but that God, the Word, is the true Light, which illuminates every human person who comes into this world; and that he was in this world, *a world made by him, but the world did not know him.* But that he came to his own home, and his own people did not receive him; but to those who did receive him he gave power to become children of God: to those, that is, who believe in his name⁴¹—none of this did I read there.

14. I also read in them that God, the Word, was born not of blood nor man's desire nor lust of the flesh, but of God;⁴² but that *the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us,*⁴³ I did not read there. I certainly observed that in these writings it was often stated, in a variety of ways, that the Son, being *in the form of God* the Father, *deemed it no robbery to be equal to God,* because he is identical with him in nature. But that *he emptied himself and took on the form of a slave, and being made in the likeness of men was found in human form, that he humbled himself and was made obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross, which is why God raised him from the dead, and gave him a name above every other name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven, on earth, or in the underworld, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, in the glory of God the Father,*⁴⁴ of this no mention was made in these books.

I did read in them that your only-begotten Son, coeternal with you, abides before all ages and above all ages, and that *of his fullness*⁴⁵ our souls receive, to become blessed thereby, and that by participation in that Wisdom which abides in itself⁴⁶ they are made new in order to become wise;⁴⁷ but that *at the*

41. Jn 1:1-12.

42. See Jn 1:13.

43. Jn 1:14.

44. Phil 2:6-11.

45. Jn 1:16.

46. See Wis 7:27.

47. He would have found a kind of trinity in Plotinus: the one, or primordial unity from which everything else derived; the realm of intellect or pure intelligence, in which there was knowledge of differentiated reality; and the realm of soul, where knowledge was grasped for. The two latter are emanations from the one and effect the transition to multiplicity. But they are not equal, and the term logos is not appropriated to the second element.

time of our weakness he died for the wicked,⁴⁸ and that you did not spare even your only Son, but delivered him up for us all,⁴⁹ these things are not to be found there. For you have *hidden these matters from the sagacious and shrewd, and revealed them to little ones,*⁵⁰ so that those who toil under heavy burdens may come to him and he may give them relief, because he is gentle and humble of heart.⁵¹ He will guide the gentle aright and teach the unassuming his ways,⁵² for he sees our lowly estate and our labor, and forgives all our sins.⁵³ As for those who are raised on the stilts of their loftier doctrine, too high to hear him calling, *Learn of me, for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you shall find rest for your souls,*⁵⁴ even if they know God, they do not honor him as God or give him thanks; their thinking has been frittered away into futility and their foolish hearts are benighted, for in claiming to be wise they have become stupid.⁵⁵

15. In consequence what I also read there was the story of their exchanging your glorious, imperishable nature for idols and a variety of man-made things, for the effigy of a perishable human or of birds or animals or crawling creatures;⁵⁶ these are the food of the Egyptians, for the sake of which Esau bartered away his dignity as the first-born,⁵⁷ just as your first-born people turned back to Egypt in their hearts,⁵⁸ worshiping a beast's head instead of you,⁵⁹ and abasing their souls, made in your image, before the image of a calf munching hay.⁶⁰

These things I found there, but I did not eat that food; for it was pleasing in your sight, Lord, to take away from Jacob the shame of his subordination and cause the elder to serve the younger,⁶¹ so you called the Gentiles into your inheritance. And I had come to you from the Gentiles. I set my heart upon the

48. Rom 5:6.

49. See Rom 8:32.

50. Mt 11:25.

51. See Mt 11:28.

52. See Ps 24(25):9.

53. See Ps 24(25):18.

54. Mt 11:29.

55. See Rom 1:21-22. Paul's thought in Rom 1:18-23 is the leitmotif of the following lines: the pagans could and did know God by natural reason, but failed to honor him, and corrupted the truth they had found with polytheism and idolatry.

56. See Rom 1:23.

57. See Gn 25:33-34. For Christian writers Egypt traditionally represented the home *par excellence* of idolatry, partly, because of the highly developed worship system of ancient Egypt, and partly because of Egypt's special place in the history of the chosen people. In his *Exposition of Psalm 46*, Augustine explains that lentils are "the food of the Egyptians" because grown abundantly there. In the present text Esau's choice to forgo his rights as first-born is seen as prefiguring the choice of the "first-born people."

58. See Acts 7:39.

59. See Ex 32:1-6.

60. See Ps 105(106):20.

61. See Gn 25:23; Rom 9:12. Esau, the elder who yields his privileged place, represents the Jews; Jacob, the younger, the Gentile Christians who inherit Israel's blessing.

gold which at your bidding your people had brought out of Egypt, because wherever it was, it belonged to you.⁶² So you told the Athenians through your apostle that in you we live and move and have our being, and that indeed some of their own authorities had said this,⁶³ and unquestionably those books I read came from there.⁶⁴ I disregarded the idols of the Egyptians, to which they paid homage with gold that belonged to you, for they perverted the truth of God into a lie, worshiping a creature and serving it rather than the creator.⁶⁵

He attempts Platonic ecstasy, but is “beaten back”

10. 16. Warned by these writings that I must return to myself,⁶⁶ I entered under your guidance the innermost places of my being; but only because you had become my helper⁶⁷ was I able to do so. I entered, then, and with the vision of my spirit, such as it was, I saw the incommutable light⁶⁸ far above my spiritual ken, transcending my mind: not this common light which every carnal eye can see, nor any light of the same order but greater, as though this common light were shining much more powerfully, far more brightly, and so extensively as to fill the universe. The light I saw was not this common light at all, but something different, utterly different, from all these things. Nor was it higher than my mind in the sense that oil floats on water or the sky is above the earth; it was exalted because this very light made me, and I was below it because by it I was made. Anyone

62. According to Ex 3:22; 11:2, the departing Israelites took the Egyptians' gold with them. Since Irenaeus and Origen this episode had been allegorically interpreted as the rightful appropriation by Christians of whatever elements of truth and goodness they could find in pagan culture, purified of polytheism and put to better use. Here it is Platonism that is represented by Egyptian gold.

63. See Acts 17:28. In fact the quotation from Aratus is the following words, "For we also are his offspring," which Augustine does not quote. But the point remains: there too, in Athens, there was "gold" before Paul arrived.

64. That is, either from Athens, regarded symbolically as the fountain-head of philosophy, or from Egypt.

65. See Rom 1:25.

66. Plotinus' advice for self-purification as a preparation for the soul's ascent, in *Enneads* I,6,9; see V,1,1; 3,4-5. But the phrase also recalls the prodigal son in Lk 15:17.

67. See Ps 29:11(30:10).

68. See Jn 1:9.

who knows truth knows it, and whoever knows it knows eternity.⁶⁹ Love knows it.

O eternal Truth, true Love, and beloved Eternity, you are my God, and for you I sigh day and night.⁷⁰ As I first began to know you you lifted me up⁷¹ and showed me that while that which I might see exists indeed, I was not yet capable of seeing it. Your rays beamed intensely upon me, beating back my feeble gaze, and I trembled with love and dread. I knew myself to be far away from you in a region of unlikeness,⁷² and I seemed to hear your voice from on high: "I am the food of the mature; grow then, and you will eat me. You will not change me into yourself like bodily food: you will be changed into me."⁷³ And I recognized that you have chastened man for his sin and caused my soul to dwindle away like a spider's web,⁷⁴ and I said, "Is truth then a nothing, simply because it is not spread out through space either finite or infinite?" Then from afar you cried to me, "By no means, for I am who am."⁷⁵

I heard it as one hears a word in the heart, and no possibility of doubt remained to me; I could more easily have doubted that I was alive than that truth exists, truth that is seen and understood through the things that are made.

New light on the problem of evil

11. 17. Contemplating other things below you, I saw that they do not in the fullest sense exist, nor yet are they completely non-beings: they are real because they are from you, but unreal inasmuch as they are not what

69. An echo of Christ's declaration in Jn 14:7. Augustine immediately goes on to "love" in the next two sentences. These clearly trinitarian terms presumably derive from his subsequent, Christian, reflection on the original experience.

70. See Ps 1:2; Jer 9:1; Ps 41:4(42:3).

71. See Ps 26(27):10.

72. The formula is from Plotinus, *Enneads* I,8,13, who derived it from Plato's "bottomless sea of unlikeness" in *Politics* 273 D6-E1. But Lk 15:13 is perhaps equally in Augustine's mind. In his *Exposition of Psalm 99*,5 he says, "In your unlikeness to God you have gone far from him; as you become like him you draw near." The idea that distance from God is equivalent to unlikeness became very influential and recurs in many Christian writers and mystics.

73. He uses eating as a metaphor for assimilating the truth of God in III,1,1; IV,1,1; X,6,8; XIII, 18,23; but here there may be eucharistic overtones as well.

74. See Ps 38:12(39:11). In his *Exposition* of this psalm (38, 18) he explains, "What is frailer than a spider's web? You have only to lay a finger lightly on it, and it is a wreck ... and this is what you do to my soul ... when you chasten me for my sin."

75. Ex 3:14.

you are. For that alone truly is, which abides unchangingly. As for me, my good is to hold fast to God,⁷⁶ for if I do not abide in him, I shall not be able to in myself; whereas he, abiding ever in himself, renews all things.⁷⁷ You are my Lord, for you need no goods of mine.⁷⁸

12. 18. It was further made clear to me that things prone to destruction are good,⁷⁹ since this destructibility would be out of the question if they were either supremely good or not good at all; because if they were supremely good they would be indestructible, whereas if they were not good at all there would be nothing in them that could be destroyed. Destruction is obviously harmful, yet it can do harm only by diminishing the good. It follows, then, that either destruction harms nothing, which is impossible, or that all things which suffer harm are being deprived of some good; this conclusion is beyond cavil. If, however, they lose all their good, they will not exist at all, for if they were to continue in existence without being any longer subject to destruction, they would be better, because permanently indestructible; and what could be more outrageous than to declare them better for having lost everything that was good in them? Hence if they are deprived of all good, they will be simply non-existent; and so it follows that as long as they do exist, they are good.

Everything that exists is good, then; and so evil, the source of which I was seeking, cannot be a substance, because if it were, it would be good. Either it would be an indestructible substance, and that would mean it was very good indeed, or it would be a substance liable to destruction—but then it would not be destructible unless it were good.

I saw, then, for it was made clear to me, that you have made all good things, and that there are absolutely no substances that you have not made. I saw too that you have not made all things equal. They all exist because they are severally good but collectively very good, for our God has made all things *exceedingly good*.⁸⁰

13. 19. For you evil has no being at all, and this is true not of yourself only but of everything you have created, since apart from you there is nothing that could burst in and disrupt the order you have imposed on it. In some parts of it certain things are regarded as evil because they do not suit

76. See Ps 72(73):28.

77. See Wis 7:27.

78. See Ps 15(16):2.

79. See Plotinus, *Enneads* III,2,5.

80. Gn 1:31; Sir 39:21.

certain others; but these same things do fit in elsewhere, and they are good there, and good in themselves. All these things that are at odds with each other belong to the lower part of creation that we call earth, which has its own cloudy, windy sky, as befits it. Far be it from me ever to say, "These things ought not to be"; because even if I could see these things alone, and longed, certainly, for something better, it would already be incumbent on me to praise you for them alone; for on earth the dragons and all the depths proclaim you worthy of praise, as do the fire, hail, snow, ice and stormy winds that obey your word, the mountains and hills, fruit-bearing trees and all cedars, wild beasts and tame, creeping creatures and birds on the wing. Earth's kings and all its peoples, rulers and the world's judges, young men and maidens, old men and youths, all praise your name.⁸¹ But since in heaven too your creatures praise you, our God, let all your angels tell your praises on high, let all your powers extol you, sun and moon, all stars and the light, the empyrean and the waters above the heavens: let them too praise your name.⁸² No longer was I hankering for any elements to be better than they were, because I was now keeping the totality in view; and though I certainly esteemed the higher creatures above the lower, a more wholesome judgment showed me that the totality was better than the higher things on their own would have been.

14. 20. There is no wholesomeness⁸³ for those who find fault with anything you have created, as there was none for me when many of the things you have made displeased me. Since my soul did not dare to find my God displeasing, it was unwilling to admit that anything that displeased it was truly yours. This was why it had strayed away into believing in a duality of substances, but there it found no rest, and only mouthed the opinions of others. Turning back again it had made for itself a god extended through infinite space, all-pervasive, and had thought this god was you, and had set him up in its heart;⁸⁴ so it became yet again a temple for its own idol and an abomination in your sight. But when you cradled my stupid head and closed my eyes to the sight of vain things⁸⁵ so that I could absent me from myself awhile, and my unwholesome madness was

81. See Ps 148:7-12.

82. See Ps 148:1-5.

83. See Ps 37:4(38:3).

84. See Ez 14:7.

85. See Ps 118(119):37.

lulled to sleep, then I awoke in you and saw you to be infinite, but in a different sense; and that vision in no way derived from the flesh.

15. 21. I turned my gaze to other things and saw that they owe their being to you and that all of them are by you defined, but in a particular sense: not as though contained in a place, but because you hold all things in your Truth as though in your hand; and all of them are true insofar as they exist, and nothing whatever is a deceit unless it is thought to be what it is not. I saw, further, that all things are set not only in their appropriate places but also in their proper times, and that you, who alone are eternal, did not set to work after incalculable stretches of time, because no stretches of time, neither those which have passed away nor those still to come, would pass or come except because you are at work and you abide eternally.

16. 22. Drawing on my own experience I found it unsurprising that bread, which is pleasant to a healthy palate, is repugnant to a sick one, and that diseased eyes hate the light which to the unclouded is delightful. Villains find even your justice disagreeable, and snakes and maggots far more so, yet you have created these things good, and fit for the lower spheres of your world. Indeed, the villains themselves are fit only for these lower regions in the measure that they are unlike you, but for the higher when they come to resemble you more closely.

I inquired then what villainy might be, but I found no substance, only the perversity of a will twisted away from you, God, the supreme substance, toward the depths—a will that throws away its life within⁸⁶ and swells with vanity abroad.

Fresh attempt at mounting to God; he attains That Which Is

17. 23. I found it amazing that though I now loved your very self, and not some figment of imagination in place of you, I could not continue steadfastly in the enjoyment of my God. I was drawn toward you by your beauty but swiftly dragged away from you by my own weight, swept back headlong and groaning onto these things below myself; and this weight was carnal habit. Nonetheless the memory of you stayed with me, and I had no doubt whatever whom I ought to cling to, though I knew that I was not yet capable of clinging, because the perishable body weighs down the soul,

86. See Sir 10:10.

and its earthly habitation oppresses a mind teeming with thoughts.⁸⁷ I was fully persuaded that your invisible reality is plainly to be understood through created things, your everlasting power also, and your divinity;⁸⁸ for I had been trying to understand how it was possible for me to appreciate the beauty of material things in the sky or on earth, and why the power to make sound judgments about changeable matters was readily available to me, so that I could say, “This thing ought to be like this, but that other different”; and in seeking the reason why I was able to judge as I did I realized that above my changeable mind soared the real, unchangeable truth, which is eternal.⁸⁹

Thus I pursued my inquiry by stages, from material things to the soul that perceives them through the body, and from there to that inner power of the soul⁹⁰ to which the body’s senses report external impressions. The intelligence of animals can reach as far as this.

I proceeded further and came to the power of discursive reason, to which the data of our senses are referred for judgment. Yet as found in me even reason acknowledged itself to be subject to change, and stretched upward to the source of its own intelligence, withholding its thoughts from the tyranny of habit⁹¹ and detaching itself from the swarms of noisy phantasms. It strove to discover what this light was that bedewed it when it cried out unhesitatingly that the Unchangeable is better than anything liable to change; it sought the fount whence flowed its concept of the Unchangeable—for unless it had in some fashion recognized Immutability, it could never with such certainty have judged it superior to things that change.

And then my mind attained to *That Which Is*, in the flash of one tremulous glance.⁹² Then indeed did I perceive your invisible reality through created things,⁹³ but to keep my gaze there was beyond my strength. I was forced back through weakness and returned to my familiar surroundings, bearing with me

87. See Wis 9:15, frequently quoted by Augustine in connection with his image of *pondus*, weight.

88. See Rom 1:20.

89. See Plotinus, *Enneads* V,1,11, where it is argued that the abiding principles of beauty and goodness cannot be the property of the individual soul as such, since our rational mind is only intermittently aware of them: they must derive from mind, or the divine source of mind, residing in us.

90. That is, the “inner sense” he referred to in I, 20, 31, which coordinates sense-impressions and relates them to the perspective self.

91. See Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* I,6,38.

92. The goal of the Plotinian ascent of the mind to God, but the last phrase echoes 1 Cor 15:52.

93. See Rom 1:20.

only a loving memory, one that yearned for something of which I had caught the fragrance, but could not yet feast upon.

He realizes the need for Christ the Mediator

18. 24. Accordingly I looked for a way to gain the strength I needed to enjoy you, but I did not find it until I embraced the mediator between God and humankind, the man Christ Jesus,⁹⁴ who also is God, supreme over all things and blessed for ever.⁹⁵ Not yet had I embraced him, though he called out, proclaiming, *I am the Way and the Truth and the Life*,⁹⁶ nor had I known him as the food which, though I was not yet strong enough to eat it, he had mingled with our flesh; for the Word became flesh so that your Wisdom, through whom you created all things,⁹⁷ might become for us the milk adapted to our infancy.⁹⁸ Not yet was I humble enough to grasp the humble Jesus as my God, nor did I know what his weakness had to teach. Your Word, the eternal Truth who towers above the higher spheres of your creation, raises up to himself those creatures who bow before him; but in these lower regions he has built himself a humble dwelling⁹⁹ from our clay,¹⁰⁰ and used it to cast down from their pretentious selves those who do not bow before him, and make a bridge to bring them to himself. He heals their swollen pride and nourishes their love, that they may not wander even further away through self-confidence, but rather weaken as they see before their feet the Godhead grown weak¹⁰¹ by sharing our garments of skin,¹⁰² and wearily fling themselves down upon him, so that he may arise and lift them up.

19. 25. I took a different view at the time, regarding Christ my Lord as no more than a man, though a man of excellent wisdom and without peer. I

94. See 1 Tm 2:5.

95. See Rom 9:5.

96. Jn 14:6. This verse implicitly underlines Augustine's whole story, though he explicitly cites it only here.

97. See Col 1:16.

98. In I,6,7 the infant Augustine sought from God the milk provided through his nurses; now as a grown man he stands in need of the milk supplied through another infancy, that of the speechless Word, in order to grow strong enough to eat the "food of the mature" mentioned in VII,10,16. The reference is primarily to the divine nature, but eucharistic overtones are strong.

99. See Prv 9:1.

100. See Gn 2:7.

101. See 1 Cor 1:25.

102. See Gn 3:21. In his *Exposition of Psalm* 103,1,8, Augustine interprets these as mortality, following Origen and Ambrose. A rich symbolism developed around this "old" clothing and the "putting on of Christ" in baptism.

was the more firmly persuaded of this because he had been born of a virgin and made plain to us by his own example that disdain for temporal goods is a condition for winning immortality; and it seemed to me that through God's solicitude for us in this respect Christ's teaching had acquired incomparable authority. But I could not even begin to guess what a mystery was concealed in the Word made flesh. All I had understood from the facts about him handed down in the scriptures—as, for instance, that he ate, drank, slept, walked, experienced joy and sorrow and spoke to the people—was that his flesh was united to your Word only in conjunction with a human soul and a human consciousness. This must be obvious to anyone who has recognized the immutability of your Word, as I had insofar as I was able, and on this score I had no doubt. It is characteristic of the instability of our soul or mind that it can move its bodily limbs at one moment and not move them at another, can be affected now by some emotion and now again be unaffected, can give expression to wise sentiments at one time and at another remain silent. If these actions were reported of him falsely it would lay the entirety of the scriptures open to suspicion of lying, and then these writings would afford no possibility of saving faith to the human race. In fact, however, the scriptures are trustworthy; and so I acknowledged Christ to be a perfect man: not a human body only, nor a body with a human soul but lacking intelligence. Yet I held that this same man was to be preferred to others not because he was Truth in person, but on account of the outstanding excellence of his human nature and his more perfect participation in wisdom.

Alypius thought that Catholics believed God to be clothed in flesh in such a way that there was in Christ nothing else but godhead and flesh; he did not think their preaching assigned to him a human soul or a human consciousness. Being firmly convinced that the actions Christ was remembered to have performed would have been impossible in the absence of a principle of created, rational life, Alypius was little disposed to Christian faith; but later on he recognized this error to be that of the Apollinarian heretics,¹⁰³ and so he came to rejoice with Catholics in their faith and to acquiesce in it.

103. Apollinaris of Laodicea, whose theories were condemned in 374, 380, and 381, held that there was no human soul in Christ, its functions being assumed by the Word.

For my own part I admit that it was later still that I learned how sharply divergent is Catholic truth from the falsehood of Photinus¹⁰⁴ with respect to the teaching that the Word was made flesh. Indeed, the discrediting of heretics serves to throw into high relief the mind of your Church and the content of sound doctrine.¹⁰⁵ for it was necessary for heresies to emerge in order to show up the people of sound faith among the weak.¹⁰⁶

Christ the Way

20. 26. But in those days, after reading the books of the Platonists and following their advice to seek for truth beyond corporeal forms, I turned my gaze toward your invisible reality, trying to understand it through created things,¹⁰⁷ and though I was rebuffed I did perceive what that reality was which the darkness of my soul would not permit me to contemplate. I was certain that you exist, that you are infinite but not spread out through space either finite or infinite, and that you exist in the fullest sense because you have always been the same,¹⁰⁸ unvarying in every respect and in no wise subject to change. All other things I saw to have their being from you¹⁰⁹ and for this I needed but one unassailable proof—the fact that they exist. On these points I was quite certain, but I was far too weak to enjoy you. Yet I readily chattered as though skilled in the subject, and had I not been seeking your way in Christ our Savior¹¹⁰ I would more probably have been killed than skilled.¹¹¹ For I had already begun to covet a reputation for wisdom, and though fully punished I shed no tears of compunction; rather was I complacently puffed up with knowledge. Where was that charity which builds¹¹² on the foundation of humility that is Christ Jesus?¹¹³ And when would those books have taught it to me? I believe that you willed me to stumble upon them before I gave my mind to your scriptures, so that the memory of how I had been affected by them might be impressed upon

104. Photinus, Bishop of Sirmium c. 340, denied the pre-existence of Christ, holding that he first came to exist in the Virgin's womb; hence he was only man, though illuminated by special divine influence.

105. See 1 Tm 1:10; 2 Tm 4:3-4; Ti 1:9; 2:1.

106. See 1 Cor 11:19. For "the weak" see Rom 14:1, to which Alypius will appeal in the garden scene, VIII, 12, 30.

107. See Rom 1:20.

108. See Ps 101:28(102:27); Heb 1:12.

109. See Rom 11:36.

110. See Ti 1:4.

111. *Non peritus sed periturus.*

112. See 1 Cor 8:1; 13:4.

113. See 1 Cor 3:11.

me when later I had been brought to a new gentleness through the study of your books, and your fingers were tending my wounds; thus insight would be mine to recognize the difference between presumption and confession, between those who see the goal but not the way to it and the Way to our beatific homeland, a homeland to be not merely descried but lived in.¹¹⁴ If I had first become well informed about your holy writings and you had grown sweet to me through my familiarity with them, and then I had afterward chanced upon those other volumes, they might perhaps have torn me loose from the strong root of piety, or else, if I had held firm in the salutary devotion I had absorbed, I might have supposed that it could be acquired equally well from those books, if everyone studied them and nothing else.

Augustine discovers Saint Paul

21. 27. It was therefore with intense eagerness that I seized on the hallowed calligraphy of your Spirit, and most especially the writings of the apostle Paul. In earlier days it had seemed to me that his teaching was self-contradictory, and in conflict with the witness of the law and the prophets,¹¹⁵ but now as these problems melted away your chaste words¹¹⁶ presented a single face to me, and I learned to rejoice with reverence.¹¹⁷

So I began to read, and discovered that every truth I had read in those other books was taught here also, but now inseparably from your gift of grace, so that no one who sees can boast as though what he sees and the very power to see it were not from you—for who has anything that he has not received?¹¹⁸ So totally is it a matter of grace that the searcher is not only invited to see you, who are ever the same,¹¹⁹ but healed as well, so that he can possess you. Whoever is too far off to see may yet walk in the way that will bring him to the place of seeing and possession; for even though a person may be delighted with God's law as far as his inmost self is concerned, how is he to deal with that other law in his bodily members which strives against the law approved by his mind, delivering him as prisoner to the law of sin dominant in his body?¹²⁰ You are

114. This heavenly *patria* is the counter-image to the "region of unlikeness" in which he found himself; see VII, 10, 16.

115. See Mt 5:17; 7:12; Lk 16:16.

116. See Ps 11:7(12:6).

117. See Ps 2:11.

118. See 1 Cor 4:7.

119. See Ps 101:28(102:27); Heb 1:12.

120. See Rom 7:22-23.

Book VIII

Conversion

1. In a spirit of thankfulness let me recall the mercies you lavished on me, O my God; to you let me confess them.¹ May I be flooded with love for you until my very bones cry out, "Who is like you, O Lord?"² Let me offer you a sacrifice of praise, for you have snapped my bonds.³ How you broke them I will relate, so that all your worshipers who hear my tale may exclaim, "Blessed be the Lord, blessed in heaven and on earth, for great and wonderful is his name."⁴

Your words were now firmly implanted in my heart of hearts, and I was besieged by you on every side.⁵ Concerning your eternal life I was now quite certain, though I had but glimpsed it like a tantalizing reflection in a mirror;⁶ this had been enough to take from me any lingering doubt concerning that imperishable substance from which every other substance derives its being. What I now longed for was not greater certainty about you, but a more steadfast abiding in you. In my daily life everything seemed to be teetering, and my heart needed to be cleansed of the old leaven.⁷ I was attracted to the Way, which is our Savior himself, but the narrowness of the path daunted me and I still could not walk in it.⁸

You inspired in me the idea that I ought to go to Simplicianus, and even I could see the sense of this. I regarded him as your good servant, a man

from whom grace radiated.⁹ Moreover I had heard how from his youth he had lived for you in complete dedication, and since he was an old man by now I assumed that after following your way of life for long years and with such noble zeal he must be rich in experience and deeply learned. And so indeed he was. I hoped, therefore, that if I could discuss my perplexities with him he would bring out from his storehouse¹⁰ appropriate advice as to how a man in my condition might walk in your way.

2. Surveying the full assembly of the Church I observed that people's lifestyles varied. For my own part I was irked by the secular business I was conducting, for no longer was I fired by ambition, and prepared on that account to endure such heavy servitude in the hope of reputation and wealth, as had formerly been the case. Those prospects held no charm for me now that I was in love with your tender kindness and the beauty of your house;¹¹ but I was in tight bondage to a woman. The apostle did not forbid me to marry, although he did propose a better choice, earnestly wishing that everyone might live as he did himself;¹² but I was too weak for that and inclined to an easier course. For this reason alone I was vacillating, bored and listless amid my shriveled cares because I was forced to adapt myself to other aspects of conjugal life to which I had pledged and constrained myself, though they were little to my liking. From the lips of your Truth I had heard that *there are eunuchs who have castrated themselves for love of the kingdom of heaven*, but the saying continues, *Let anyone accept this who can.*¹³

How foolish are they who know not God! So many good things before their eyes, yet *Him Who Is* they fail to see.¹⁴ I was trapped in that foolishness no longer, for I had left it behind by hearkening to the concerted witness of your whole creation, and had discovered you, our creator, and your Word, who dwells with you and is with you the one sole God, through whom you have created all things.¹⁵ But there are impious people of another type, who do recognize God yet have not glorified him as God, nor

1. See Ps 85(86):13; Is 63:7.

2. See Ps 34(35):10.

3. See Ps 115(116):16-17.

4. See Pss 134(135):6; 75:2(76:1); 8:2(1).

5. See Is 29:2.

6. See 1 Cor 13:12.

7. See 1 Cor 5:7-8.

8. See Mt 7:14.

9. Theological mentor for many years to Ambrose and later to Augustine, Simplicianus in spite of his advanced age succeeded Ambrose as bishop of Milan in 397.

10. See Mt 13:52.

11. See Ps 25(26):8.

12. See 1 Cor 7:7-8, where Paul discusses marriage and celibacy within the Christian calling, an issue which was becoming crucial for Augustine.

13. Mt 19:12.

14. See Wis 13:1.

15. See Jn 1:1-3.

given him thanks.¹⁶ Into that error too I had formerly blundered, but your right hand grasped me,¹⁷ plucked me out of it and put me in a place where I could be healed, for you have told us that *reverence for God—that is wisdom*,¹⁸ and warned us, *Do not give yourself airs for wisdom*, because *those who believed themselves wise have sunk into folly*.¹⁹ I had found a precious pearl, worth buying at the cost of all I had;²⁰ but I went on hesitating.

Conversation with Simplicianus

2. 3. Accordingly I made my way to Simplicianus. When Ambrose, then bishop, had been baptized, Simplicianus had stood as father to him, and Ambrose regarded him with affection as a father indeed. To him I described the winding paths of my wayward life. When I mentioned that I had read certain Platonist books, translated into Latin by Victorinus, who had formerly been a rhetorician in Rome but had, as I had heard, died a Christian, Simplicianus told me how fortunate I was not to have stumbled on the writings of other philosophers, works full of fallacies and dishonesty that smacked of the principles of this world,²¹ whereas those Platonist writings conveyed in every possible way, albeit indirectly, the truth of God and his Word.

Story of Victorinus' conversion

He went on to reminisce about this Victorinus²² with the object of inculcating in me that humility of Christ which is hidden from the sagacious but revealed to little ones.²³ He knew him intimately in Rome, and he told me a story about Victorinus which I will not pass over in silence, since it power-

16. See Rom 1:21.

17. See Ps 117:36(118:35).

18. Jb 28:28.

19. Prv 26:5; Rom 1:22.

20. See Mt 13:46; 19:21.

21. See Col 2:8.

22. Gaius Marius Victorinus Afer, thought to have been born sometime between 281 and 291, a highly cultured author and later a theologian. The parallel between this philosophically-inclined rhetorician hesitating on the threshold of the Church, and the young Augustine, must have been evident to Simplicianus.

23. See Mt 11:25.

fully redounds to the praise of your grace and moves me to confession, this story of a deeply learned old man.

Thoroughly conversant with all the liberal arts, Victorinus had also read widely and with discrimination in philosophy and had taught many a noble senator; in recognition of his distinction as a teacher a statue had been erected to him in the Roman forum, which was a very high honor in the eyes of worldly people, and one he well deserved. Until this period of his life he had been a worshiper of idols and shared the abominable superstitions which at that time blew like an ill wind through almost the whole of the Roman nobility, who were agog for Pelusium²⁴ and for

Anubis, dog-voiced god, and monstrous deities
of many a hue, who warred in days gone by
against Minerva, Neptune, Venus....²⁵

These gods Rome had once vanquished, but now worshiped, and the elderly Victorinus with his terrible thunders had habitually defended their cults; yet he was not ashamed to become a child of your Christ and be born as an infant from your font, bending his neck to the yoke of humility²⁶ and accepting on his docile brow the sign of the ignominious cross.²⁷

4. O Lord, Lord, who bade your heavens stoop, who touched the mountains and set them smoking,²⁸ by what means did you make your hidden way into that man's breast? The story as Simplicianus told it to me was this. Victorinus was in the habit of reading holy scripture and intensively studying all the Christian writings, which he subjected to close scrutiny; and he would say to Simplicianus, not openly but in private, intimate conversation, "I am already a Christian, you know." But the other always replied, "I will not believe that, nor count you among Christians, until I see you in Christ's Church." Victorinus would chaff him: "It's the walls that make Christians, then?" He would often talk like this, claiming that he was a Christian. Simplicianus often responded in the same way, and Victorinus would frequently repeat his joke about walls.

24. A city in Egypt. The text is corrupt here and conjectures abound, but the context suggests an Eastern or Egyptian deity. The Romans had deserted their traditional gods in favor of those of the conquered peoples.

25. Virgil, *Aeneid* VIII,698-700.

26. See Sir 51:34; Jer 27:12; Mt 11:29.

27. See Gal 5:11.

28. See Ps 143(144):5.

The fact was that he was sorely afraid of upsetting the proud demon-worshipers who were his friends, fearing that the weight of their resentment might come storming down on him from the peak of their Babylonian grandeur,²⁹ as though from lofty cedars on Lebanon not yet felled by the Lord.³⁰ But later he drank in courage from his avid reading and came to fear that he might be disowned by Christ before his holy angels if he feared to confess him before men and women.³¹ In his own eyes he was guilty of a great crime in being ashamed of the holy mysteries instituted by your humble Word, while feeling no shame at the sacrilegious rites of proud demons, whose likeness he had been proud to assume himself. Accordingly he threw off the shamefacedness provoked by vanity and became modest in the face of truth: suddenly and without warning he said to Simplicianus, who told this tale, "Let us go to church: I want to become a Christian."

Hardly able to contain his joy, Simplicianus went with him. He was initiated into the first stage of the catechumenate,³² and not long afterward he gave in his name, asking for rebirth in baptism.³³ Rome stood amazed, while the Church was jubilant. The proud looked on and fumed with anger; they ground their teeth in impotent fury;³⁴ but as for your servant, the Lord God was his hope, and he had no eyes for vanities or lying follies.³⁵

5. Eventually the time came for him to make his profession of faith. Custom decrees that those who are approaching your grace in baptism make their profession in the presence of the baptized community of Rome, standing on a raised platform and using a set form of words which has been

29. For Babylon as a symbol of pride, see Is 14:4.12.13; and, identified with pagan Rome, Rv 17:5; 18:2.

30. See Ps 28(29):5.

31. See Mk 8:38 and par.

32. This comprised exorcism, the signing of the catechumen's forehead with the cross, the laying on of hands and the giving of salt. In this first stage the catechumens were *audientes*, hearers during the liturgy of the word.

33. The giving in of one's name, usually at the beginning of Lent, marked the transition to the second stage, that of the *competentes*, during which intensive instruction and the entrusting of the Lord's Prayer and the Creed to the catechumens prepared them for baptism at Easter.

34. See Ps 111(112):10.

35. See Ps 39:5(40:4).

entrusted to them and committed to memory.³⁶ Simplicianus told me that Victorinus had been offered by the priests the option of making his statement more privately, for it was customary to offer this concession to people who were likely to lose their nerve through shyness, but that he had chosen rather to proclaim his salvation before the holy company. What he taught in rhetoric was not salvation, he said, yet he had professed that publicly enough. If he was not afraid to address crowds of crazy people in his own words, how much less ought he to fear your peaceable flock as he uttered your word?

As he climbed up to repeat the Creed they all shouted his name to one another in a clamorous outburst of thanksgiving—everyone who knew him, that is; and was there anyone present who did not? Then in more subdued tones the word passed from joyful mouth to joyful mouth among them all: "Victorinus, Victorinus!" Spontaneous was their shout of delight as they saw him, and spontaneous their attentive silence to hear him. With magnificent confidence he proclaimed the true faith, and all the people longed to clasp him tenderly to their hearts. And so they did, by loving him and rejoicing with him, for those affections were like clasping hands.

3. 6. O God, who are so good, what is it in the human heart that makes us rejoice more intensely over the salvation of a soul which is despaired of but then freed from grave danger, than we would if there had always been good prospects for it and its peril slighter? You too, merciful Father, yes, even you are more joyful over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance.³⁷ And we likewise listen with overflowing gladness when we hear how the shepherd carries back on exultant shoulders the sheep that had strayed,³⁸ and how the coin is returned to your treasury as neighbors share the glee of the woman who found it,³⁹ while the joy of your eucharistic assembly wrings tears from us when the story is read in your house of a younger son who was dead, but has come back to life, was lost but is found.⁴⁰ You express your own joy through ours, and through the joy of your angels who are made holy by

36. This is the *reddito symboli*, the "handing back" of the words of the Creed that the catechumens had been taught. The "discipline of secrecy," still in force in the mid-fourth century, forbade them to write it down.

37. See Lk 15:4-7.

38. See Lk 15:4-6; Ps 118(119):176.

39. See Lk 15:8-9.

40. Lk 15:24.32.

their holy charity; for you yourself are ever the same,⁴¹ and all transient things, things which cannot abide constantly in their mode of being, are known to your unchanging intelligence.

7. What is going on in our minds, then, that we should be more highly delighted at finding cherished objects, or having them restored to us, than if we had always kept them safe? Other instances bear this out, and all our experience shouts its corroboration, "Yes, truly this is so." A victorious emperor celebrates his triumph. He would not have been victorious had there been no war, and the more imperiled he has been in battle, the more elated he is in his triumph. Or a storm batters mariners and threatens them with shipwreck. Every face pales at the prospect of death,⁴² but sky and sea grow calm, and the sailors' joy is as intense as lately was their fear. Or someone we love falls sick. His pulse betrays the gravity of his condition, and all who long for his recovery are equally tormented in their minds. Then he takes a turn for the better, and although he is not yet walking with his pristine vigor there is already such joy as never there was when in earlier days he strode about well and strong.

Even the natural pleasures of human life are attained through distress, not only through the unexpected calamities that befall against our will but also through deliberate and planned discomfort. There is no pleasure in eating and drinking unless the discomfort of hunger and thirst have preceded them. Drunkards eat somewhat salty food to induce a searing, parched sensation, which will be deliciously quenched by a drink. Then again, custom requires that after betrothal brides shall not be handed over immediately, lest after marriage a man hold cheap the woman for whom he did not as a bridegroom have to sigh and wait.

8. This law holds for shameful, demeaning pleasure, but the same is true for what is permitted and lawful, the same for the most sincere and honorable friendship, and the same for that young man who had died but come back to life, had perished but was found. In every case greater sorrow issues in greater joy. How can this be, O Lord my God, when you are yourself your own eternal joy, and all around you heaven rejoices in you eternally? Why is it that our part of creation swings between decay and growth, pain and reconciliation? Perhaps because this is the proper mode of being for these things and with this alone you endowed them

41. See Ps 101:28 (102:27).

42. See Virgil, *Aeneid* IV, 644.

when from highest heaven to the lowest places of the earth, from the dawn of the ages to their end, from angel to tiny worm, from the first stirring of change to the last, you assigned all classes of good things and all your righteous works to their appropriate places, and activated them at their proper times?

Ah, how high you are in the heights of heaven,⁴³ how deep in the depths! From no place are you absent, yet how tardily do we return to you!

4. 9. Come, Lord, arouse us and call us back, kindle us and seize us, prove to us how sweet you are in your burning tenderness; let us love you and run to you.⁴⁴ Are there not many who return to you from a deeper, blinder pit than did Victorinus, many who draw near to you and are illumined⁴⁵ as they welcome the light, and in welcoming it receive from you the power to become children of God?⁴⁶ Yet if they are less well known to the populace, even people who do know them find less joy in their conversion, because whenever joy is shared among many, even the gladness of individuals is increased, for all are affected by the common enthusiasm and they catch the flame from one another. Moreover, the fact that these converts are generally known ensures that they become for many an authoritative example pointing toward salvation; they forge ahead of crowds that will follow. That is why many who have made the journey before them rejoice particularly, with an eye to others besides these lone individuals.

Forbid it, Lord, that rich personages should ever be more welcome in your tabernacle than the poor, or the nobility than lowly folk,⁴⁷ when your own preferential choice fell upon the weak things of this world in order to shame the strong, upon lowly things, contemptible things and nonentities, as though they really were, to set at nought the things that are.⁴⁸ Nevertheless the least of your apostles,⁴⁹ through whose tongue you sent those words re-echoing, loved to be called not by his former name, "Saul," but "Paul," to commemorate that glorious victory when the proconsul

43. See Ps 112(113):4-5; Is 33:5.

44. See Sg 1:2-3.

45. See Ps 33:6(34:5).

46. See Jn 1:9,12.

47. See Dt 1:17; 16:19; Sir 42:1; Acts 10:34; Jas 2:1-9.

48. See 1 Cor 1:27-28; Rom 4:17.

49. See 1 Cor 15:9.

Paulus,⁵⁰ his pride beaten down⁵¹ by the apostle's arms, was brought under Christ's lenient yoke to become a common subject of the great King.⁵² The enemy is more thoroughly trounced in a person over whom he had a more powerful hold, or through whom he had a hold over a greater number of others; and stronger is his grip over those who on pretext of nobility are proud, stronger too his hold over many another on pretext of their authority.

The higher, then, the value set on the soul of Victorinus, which the devil had captured as an impregnable stronghold, and on Victorinus' tongue, which the devil had wielded like a huge, sharp weapon to destroy many, the greater was the gladness with which your children rightly rejoiced on seeing the powerful foe bound by our King⁵³ and his weaponry seized, cleaned, and made fit to serve in your honor as equipment useful to the Master for every good purpose.⁵⁴

Augustine longs to imitate him, but is hindered by lustful habit

5. 10. On hearing this story I was fired to imitate Victorinus; indeed it was to this end that your servant Simplicianus had related it. But he added a further point. When in the reign of the Emperor Julian a law was passed which forbade Christians to teach literature and rhetoric, Victorinus willingly complied, for he preferred to abandon his school of talkativeness rather than forsake your word, through which you impart eloquence to the tongues of speechless babes.⁵⁵ In my eyes he appeared not so much heroic as all the happier for having taken this step, since it afforded him the opportunity to be at leisure for you. I ached for a like chance myself, for it was no iron chain imposed by anyone else that fettered me, but the iron of my own will. The enemy had my power of willing in his clutches, and from it had forged a chain to bind me. The truth is that disordered lust springs from a perverted will; when lust is pandered to, a habit is formed; when

50. See Acts 13:7-12.

51. See Virgil, *Aeneid* VI,853.

52. *Provincialis* originally meant a civilian as opposed to a soldier. Augustine uses it elsewhere to mean a "layperson" as distinct from a monk or cleric. Here the point is that from being a great man in the imperial system Sergius Paulus became an obscure private citizen in Christ's kingdom.

53. See Mt 12:29.

54. See 2 Tm 2:21.

55. See Wis 10:21.

habit is not checked, it hardens into compulsion. These were like interlinking rings forming what I have described as a chain, and my harsh servitude used it to keep me under duress.

A new will had begun to emerge in me, the will to worship you disinterestedly⁵⁶ and enjoy you, O God, our only sure felicity; but it was not yet capable of surmounting that earlier will strengthened by inveterate custom. And so the two wills fought it out—the old and the new,⁵⁷ the one carnal, the other spiritual—and in their struggle tore my soul apart.

11. I thus came to understand from my own experience what I had read, how the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit strives against the flesh.⁵⁸ I was aligned with both, but more with the desires I approved in myself than with those I frowned upon, for in these latter I was not really the agent, since for the most part I was enduring them against my will rather than acting freely.⁵⁹ All the same, the force of habit that fought against me had grown fiercer by my own doing, because I had come willingly to this point where I now wished not to be. And who has any right to object, when just punishment catches up with a sinner?

I had grown used to pretending that the only reason why I had not yet turned my back on the world to serve you was that my perception of the truth was uncertain, but that excuse was no longer available to me, for by now it was certain. But I was still entangled by the earth and refused to enlist in your service,⁶⁰ for the prospect of being freed from all these encumbrances frightened me as much as the encumbrances themselves ought to have done.

12. I was thus weighed down by the pleasant burden of the world in the way one commonly is by sleep, and the thoughts with which I attempted to meditate upon you⁶¹ were like the efforts of people who are trying to wake up, but are overpowered and immersed once more in slumberous deeps. No one wants to be asleep all the time, and it is generally agreed among sensible people that being awake is a better state, yet it often happens that a person puts off the moment when he must shake himself out of sleep because his limbs are heavy with a lassitude that pulls him toward the

56. See Jb 1:9 (Old Latin).

57. See Eph 4:22.24; Col 3:9-10.

58. See Gal 5:17.

59. See Rom 7:16-17.

60. See 2 Tm 2:4.

61. See Ps 62:7(63:6), a psalm of early-morning imagery, like this paragraph.

more attractive alternative, even though he is already trying to resist it and the hour for rising has come; in a similar way I was quite sure that surrendering myself to your love would be better than succumbing to my lust, but while the former course commended itself and was beginning to conquer, the latter charmed and chained me. I had no answer to give as you said to me, *Arise, sleeper, rise from the dead: Christ will enlighten you.*⁶² and plied me with evidence that you spoke truly; no, I was convinced by the truth and had no answer whatever except the sluggish, drowsy words, "Just a minute," "One more minute," "Let me have a little longer." But these "minutes" never diminished, and my "little longer" lasted inordinately long.

To find my delight in your law as far as my inmost self was concerned was of no profit to me when a different law in my bodily members was warring against the law of my mind, imprisoning me under the law of sin which held sway in my lower self. For the law of sin is that brute force of habit whereby the mind is dragged along and held fast against its will, and deservedly so because it slipped into the habit willingly. In my wretched state, who was there to free me from this death-doomed body, save your grace through Jesus Christ our Lord?⁶³

Conversation with Ponticianus

6. 13. Now I will relate how you set me free from a craving for sexual gratification which fettered me like a tight-drawn chain, and from my enslavement to worldly affairs: I will confess to your name, O Lord,⁶⁴ my helper and redeemer.

I continued to attend to my accustomed duties, but with mounting anxiety. I longed for you every day and spent as much time in your church as could be spared from my business, under the weight of which I was groaning. With me was Alypius, who since his third stint as assessor⁶⁵ had been without legal advisory work, and was now looking round for clients to whom he might once more sell his counsel, just as I was trying to sell the art of speaking, insofar as it ever can be imparted by teaching. Nebridius,

62. Eph 5:14.

63. See Rom 7:24-25.

64. See Ps 53:8(54:6).

65. See VI,10,16.

however, yielding to our friendly persuasion, had consented to act as assistant teacher to Verecundus, a citizen and schoolmaster of Milan who was very well known to us all. This man had most earnestly desired reliable help from someone of our company, for he stood in sore need of it, and he had reinforced his insistent plea by appealing to his close association with us. Nebridius was not, therefore, attracted to this post by ambition for the advantages it might bring him, for he could have done better by the profession of literature, had he willed; he undertook it simply as a kindly service because, being such a very gentle and accommodating friend, he was unwilling to set our request aside. He carried out his duties with the utmost discretion, taking care not to attract the attention of persons whom the world regarded as important. He thus steered clear of any mental disturbance they might have caused him, for he wanted to keep his mind free and disengaged for as much of his time as he possibly could, with a view to research and to reading or listening to anything connected with wisdom.

14. On a certain day when Nebridius was absent (I forget why), something happened. A man named Pontianus, who held an important post at court, came to our house to visit Alypius and me; being an African he was our compatriot, and he wanted something or other from us. We sat down together and talked. His eye happened to light upon a book that lay on a gaming table nearby;⁶⁶ he picked it up, opened it and found it to be the letters of the apostle Paul. This was certainly unexpected, for he had supposed it to be the kind of thing I exhausted myself in teaching. But then he smiled, looked up at me and offered his congratulations, surprised by his sudden discovery that those writings, and those alone, were under my eye. He was himself a baptized Christian and made a practice of prostrating himself in church before you, our God, in frequent and prolonged prayers. When I remarked that I was applying myself to intensive study of those scriptures, he began to tell us about the monk Antony of Egypt, whose name was illustrious and held in high honor among your servants, though we had never heard it until this moment.⁶⁷ When Pontianus learned this he dwelt more fully on the subject, enlightening us about the great man; he was astonished at our ignorance. But we were stupefied as

66. The juxtaposition of these two objects, representing respectively Augustine's future and his past, may be intended to heighten the dramatic effect.

67. Antony of Egypt, c. 250-356, called "the father of monks."

we listened to the tale of the wonders you had worked within the true faith of the Catholic Church, especially as they were most firmly attested by recent memory and had occurred so near to our own times. So all of us were amazed: we because they were so tremendous, and he because we had never heard of them.

15. His discourse led on from this topic to the proliferation of monasteries, the sweet fragrance rising up to you from the lives of monks, and the fecund wastelands of the desert. We had known nothing of all this.⁶⁸ There was even a monastery full of good brothers at Milan, outside the city walls, under Ambrose's care, yet we were unaware of it.

Story of conversion of two court officials at Trier

Pontianus went on talking and developing the theme, while we listened, spellbound. So it came about that he told us that one day when the court was at Trier⁶⁹ he and three of his colleagues went out for a walk in the gardens abutting on the walls,⁷⁰ while the emperor was occupied with the morning show at the circus. Now it happened that as they strolled about they split into pairs, one companion staying with Pontianus while the other two went off by themselves. In their wandering these latter chanced upon a cottage where some servants of yours were living, men poor in spirit, the kind of people to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs.⁷¹ There they found a book which contained *The Life of Antony*.⁷² One of them began to read it. His admiration and enthusiasm were aroused, and as he read he began to mull over the possibility of appropriating the same kind of life for himself, by renouncing his secular career to serve you alone. (He belonged to the ranks of so-called administrative officers.⁷³) Then quite suddenly he was filled with a love of

68. Though monasticism was already flourishing in Egypt and Cappadocia, there were few monasteries in Africa before Augustine's time, which may account for his ignorance.

69. Trier had been the capital of the Western Empire since Diocletian's time, but the court removed thence to Milan in 381. Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria had been in exile at Trier from 335 to 337; some lingering memory of him may explain the following episode.

70. The setting of this scene in a garden anticipates the experience of Augustine and Alypius in another garden, soon to be related; the parallel is reinforced by many verbal similarities.

71. See Mt 5:3.

72. Attributed to Athanasius and translated into Latin by Jerome's friend Evagrius.

73. These were inspectors in the imperial bureaucracy, sometimes used like secret police or intelligence agents, but more often in communications.

holiness and a realistic sense of shame and disgust with himself;⁷⁴ he turned his gaze toward his friend and demanded, "Tell me: where do we hope all our efforts are going to get us? What are we looking for? In whose cause are we striving? Does life at court promise us anything better than promotion to being Friends of the Emperor?"⁷⁵ And once we are, will that not be a precarious position, fraught with perils? Will it not mean negotiating many a hazard, only to end in greater danger still? And how long would it take us to get there? Whereas I can become a friend of God⁷⁶ here and now if I want to."

Even as he spoke he was in labor with the new life that was struggling to birth within him. He directed his eyes back to the page, and as he read a change began to occur in that hidden place within him where you alone can see; his mind was being stripped of the world, as presently became apparent. The flood-tide of his heart leapt on, and at last he broke off his reading with a groan as he discerned the right course and determined to take it. By now he belonged to you. "I have already torn myself away from the ambitions we cherished, and have made up my mind to serve God," he told his friend. "I am going to set about it this very moment and in this place. If you have no stomach to imitate me, at least don't stand in my way." The other replied that he would bear him company, both in the noble reward and in the glorious combat. And both of them, now enlisted in your service, began to build their tower, knowing the cost full well: they abandoned all their possessions and followed you.⁷⁷

Meanwhile Pontianus was walking with his companion through other parts of the garden. In search of their friends they arrived at the place, and on finding them there urged them to return, for it was growing late. They, however, told their story, announcing the plan on which they had resolved and describing how the will to take this course had arisen within them and grown firm; and they begged their friends at least to place no obstacles in their way, if they had no mind to join them. Pontianus and his companion shed tears on their own account, as he related, even though they were in no way altered from the men they had been. They offered devout congratulations to their friends and commended themselves to their prayers; then they went back to the palace, dragging heavy hearts along the ground, while their friends stayed in the cottage with hearts set on heaven. Both

74. See Ps 4:5(4).

75. People of senatorial or equestrian rank who formed the emperor's entourage and acted as advisors.

76. See Jas 2:23; Jdt 8:22.

77. See Lk 14:28; Mt 19:27; Lk 5:11.28.

were engaged to be married, and when their fiancées later heard of their decision, they likewise dedicated their virginity to you.

7. 16. Pontianus went on with his story; but, Lord, even while he spoke you were wrenching me back toward myself, and pulling me round from that standpoint behind my back⁷⁸ which I had taken to avoid looking at myself. You set me down before my face,⁷⁹ forcing me to mark how despicable I was, how misshapen and begrimed, filthy and festering. I saw and shuddered. If I tried to turn my gaze away, he went on relentlessly telling his tale, and you set me before myself once more, thrusting me into my sight that I might perceive my sin and hate it.⁸⁰ I had been aware of it all along, but I had been glossing over it, suppressing it and forgetting.

17. But now self-abhorrence possessed me, all the harsher as my heart went out more ardently to those young men, and I heard of the blessed impulsiveness with which they had without reserve handed themselves over to you for healing. By contrast with them I felt myself loathsome, remembering how many of my years—twelve, perhaps—had gone to waste, and I with them, since my nineteenth year when I was aroused to pursue wisdom by the reading of Cicero's *Hortensius*.⁸¹ I had been putting off the moment when by spurning earthly happiness I would clear space in my life to search for wisdom; yet even to seek it, let alone find it, would have been more rewarding than discovery of treasure or possession of all this world's kingdoms, or having every bodily pleasure at my beck and call. I had been extremely miserable in adolescence, miserable from its very onset, and as I prayed to you for the gift of chastity I had even pleaded, "Grant me chastity and self-control, but please not yet." I was afraid that you might hear me immediately and heal me forthwith of the morbid lust which I was more anxious to satisfy than to snuff out. So I had wandered off into the crooked paths⁸² of a sacrilegious superstition, not because I had any certainty about it but because I preferred it to other beliefs—not that I was investigating these in any spirit of reverence: rather was I opposing them with malicious intent.

78. See Jer 2:27.

79. See Ps 49(50):21.

80. See Ps 35:3(36:2).

81. See III,4,7. We are now in 386; the following scene occurs in August.

82. See Sir 2:16.

18. I had been telling myself that my reason for putting off day after day⁸³ the decision to renounce worldly ambition and follow you alone was that I could as yet see no certain light by which to steer my course. But the day had dawned when I was stripped naked in my own eyes and my conscience challenged me within: "Where is your ready tongue now? You have been professing yourself reluctant to throw off your load of illusion because truth was uncertain. Well, it is certain now, yet the burden still weighs you down, while other people are given wings on freer shoulders,⁸⁴ people who have not worn themselves out with research, nor spent a decade and more reflecting on these questions."

My conscience gnawed away at me in this fashion, and I was fiercely shamed and flung into hideous confusion while Pontianus was relating all this. Having brought the conversation to a close and settled his business with us, he returned to his place, and I to myself.

Was anything left unsaid in my inner debate? Was there any whip of sage advice I left unused to lash my soul into coming with me, as I tried to follow you? It fought and resisted, but could find no excuse. All its arguments had been used up and refuted, but there remained a dumb dread: frightful as death seemed the restraining of habit's oozy discharge, that very seepage which was rotting it to death.

Struggle in the garden

8. 19. Within the house of my spirit the violent conflict raged on, the quarrel with my soul that I had so powerfully provoked in our secret dwelling, my heart,⁸⁵ and at the height of it I rushed to Alypius with my mental anguish plain upon my face. "What is happening to us?" I exclaimed. "What does this mean? What did you make of it? The untaught are rising up and taking heaven by storm,⁸⁶ while we with all our dispassionate teachings are still groveling in this world of flesh and blood!⁸⁷ Are we ashamed to follow, just because they have taken the lead, yet not ashamed of lacking the courage even to follow?" Some such words as these I spoke, and then my frenzy tore me away from him, while he

83. See Sir 5:8.

84. See Ps 54:7(55:6).

85. See Mt 6:6.

86. See Mt 11:12.

87. See 1 Cor 15:50; Mt 16:17; Gal 1:16.

regarded me in silent bewilderment. Unusual, certainly, was my speech, but my brow, cheeks and eyes, my flushed countenance and the cadences of my voice expressed my mind more fully than the words I uttered.

Adjacent to our lodgings was a small garden. We were free to make use of it as well as of the house, for our host, who owned the house, did not live there. The tumult in my breast had swept me away to this place, where no one would interfere with the blazing dispute I had engaged in with myself until it should be resolved. What the outcome would be you knew, not I. All I knew was that I was going mad, but for the sake of my sanity, and dying that I might live, aware of the evil that I was but unaware of the good I was soon to become. So I went out into the garden and Alypius followed at my heels; my privacy was not infringed by his presence, and, in any case, how could he abandon me in that state? We sat down as far as possible from the house. I was groaning in spirit⁸⁸ and shaken by violent anger because I could form no resolve to enter into a covenant with you, though in my bones I knew that this was what I ought to do,⁸⁹ and everything in me lauded such a course to the skies. It was a journey not to be undertaken by ship or carriage or on foot,⁹⁰ nor need it take me even that short distance I had walked from the house to the place where we were sitting; for to travel—and more, to reach journey's end—was nothing else but to want to go there, but to want it valiantly and with all my heart, not to whirl and toss this way and that a will half crippled by the struggle, as part of it rose up to walk while part sank down.

20. While this vacillation was at its most intense many of my bodily gestures were of the kind that people sometimes want to perform but cannot, either because the requisite limbs are missing, or because they are bound and restricted, or paralyzed through illness, or in some other way impeded. If I tore out my hair, battered my forehead, entwined my fingers and clasped them round my knee, I did so because I wanted to. I might have wanted to but found myself unable, if my limbs had not been mobile enough to obey. So then, there were plenty of actions that I performed where willing was not the same thing as being able; yet I was not doing the one thing that was incomparably more desirable to me, the thing that I would be able to do as soon as I willed, because as soon as I willed—why,

88. See Jn 11:33.

89. See Ps 34(35):10.

90. See I,18,28.

then, I would be willing it! For in this sole instance the faculty to act and the will to act precisely coincide, and the willing is already the doing. Yet this was not happening. My body was more ready to obey the slightest whim of my soul in the matter of moving my limbs, than the soul was to obey its own command in carrying out this major volition, which was to be accomplished within the will alone.

9. 21. How did this bizarre situation arise, how develop? May your mercy shed light on my inquiry, so that perhaps an answer may be found in the mysterious punishments meted out to humankind, those utterly baffling pains that afflict the children of Adam. How then did this bizarre situation arise, how develop? The mind commands the body and is instantly obeyed; the mind commands itself, and meets with resistance. When the mind orders the hand to move, so smooth is the compliance that command can scarcely be distinguished from execution; yet the mind is mind, while the hand is body. When the mind issues its command that the mind itself should will something (and the mind so commanded is no other than itself), it fails to do so. How did this bizarre situation arise, how develop? As I say, the mind commands itself to will something: it would not be giving the order if it did not want this thing; yet it does not do what it commands.

Evidently, then, it does not want this thing with the whole of itself, and therefore the command does not proceed from an undivided mind. Inasmuch as it issues the command, it does will it, but inasmuch as the command is not carried out, it does not will it. What the will is ordering is that a certain volition should exist, and this volition is not some alien thing, but its very self. Hence it cannot be giving the order with its whole self. It cannot be identical with that thing which it is commanding to come into existence, for if it were whole and entire it would not command itself to be, since it would be already.

This partial willing and partial non-willing is thus not so bizarre, but a sickness of the mind, which cannot rise with its whole self on the wings of truth because it is heavily burdened by habit. There are two wills, then, and neither is the whole: what one has the other lacks.

10. 22. Some there are who on perceiving two wills engaged in deliberation assert that in us there are two natures, one good, the other evil, each with a mind of its own.⁹¹ Let them perish from your presence, O God,⁹² as

91. Throughout this chapter Augustine attacks Manichean views.

92. See Ps 67:3(68:2).

perish all who talk wildly and lead our minds astray.⁹³ They are evil themselves as long as they hold these opinions, yet these same people will be good if they embrace true opinions and assent to true teaching, and so merit the apostle's commendation, *You were darkness once, but now you are light in the Lord.*⁹⁴ The trouble is that they want to be light not in the Lord but in themselves, with their notion that the soul is by nature divine, and so they have become denser darkness still, because by their appalling arrogance they have moved further away from you, the true Light, who enlighten everyone who comes into the world.⁹⁵ I warn these people, Take stock of what you are saying, and let it shame you; but once draw near to him and be illumined, and your faces will not blush with shame.⁹⁶

When I was making up my mind to serve the Lord my God⁹⁷ at last, as I had long since purposed, I was the one who wanted to follow that course, and I was the one who wanted not to. I was the only one involved. I neither wanted it wholeheartedly nor turned from it wholeheartedly. I was at odds with myself, and fragmenting myself. This disintegration was occurring without my consent, but what it indicated was not the presence in me of a mind belonging to some alien nature but the punishment undergone by my own. In this sense, and this sense only, it was not I who brought it about, but the sin that dwelt within me⁹⁸ as penalty for that other sin committed with greater freedom;⁹⁹ for I was a son of Adam.

23. Moreover, if we were to take the number of conflicting urges to signify the number of natures present in us, we should have to assume that there are not two, but many. If someone is trying to make up his mind whether to go to a Manichean conventicle or to the theater, the Manichees declare, "There you are, there's the evidence for two natures: the good one is dragging him our way, the bad one is pulling him back in the other direction. How else explain this dithering between contradictory wills?" But I regard both as bad, the one that leads him to them and the one that lures

93. See Ti 1:10.

94. Eph 5:8.

95. See Jn 1:9.

96. See Ps 33:6(34:5).

97. See Dt 6:13; Mt 4:10; Jer 30:9.

98. See Rom 7:17,20.

99. That is, by Adam. Augustine uses the comparative to suggest a relative freedom enjoyed by Adam, superior to our own but short of perfect freedom. He was to spell out the distinction later in *Correction and Grace* XII,33 between *posse non peccare* (the ability not to sin, Adam's privilege), and *non posse peccare* (the perfection of freedom in heaven).

him back to the theater. They, on the contrary, think that an inclination toward them can only be good.

But consider this: suppose one of our people is deliberating, and as two desires clash he is undecided whether to go to the theater or to our church, will not our opponents too be undecided what attitude to take? Either they will have to admit that it is good will that leads a person to our church, just as good as that which leads to theirs the people who are initiated into their sacred rites and trapped there—and this they are unwilling to admit; or they will conclude that two evil natures and two bad minds are pitted against each other within one person, in which case their habitual assertion of one good and one evil nature will be erroneous; or, finally, they will be brought round to the truth and no longer deny that when a person is deliberating there is but one soul, thrown into turmoil by divergent impulses.

24. When, therefore, they observe two conflicting impulses within one person, let them stop saying that two hostile minds are at war, one good, the other evil, and that these derive from two hostile substances and two hostile principles. For you are true, O God, and so you chide and rebuke them and prove them wrong. The choice may lie between two impulses that are both evil, as when a person is debating whether to murder someone with poison or a dagger; whether to annex this part of another man's property or that, assuming he cannot get both; whether to buy himself pleasure by extravagant spending or hoard his money out of avarice; whether to go to the circus or the theater if both performances are on the same day—and I would even add a third possibility: whether to go and steal from someone else's house while he has the chance, and a fourth as well: whether to commit adultery while he is about it. All these impulses may occur together, at exactly the same time, and all be equally tempting, but they cannot all be acted upon at once. The mind is then rent apart by the plethora of desirable objects as four inclinations, or even more, do battle among themselves; yet the Manichees do not claim that there are as many disparate substances in us as this.

The same holds true for good impulses. I would put these questions to them: Is it good to find delight in a reading from the apostle? To enjoy the serenity of a psalm? To discuss the gospel? To each point they will reply, "Yes, that is good." Where does that leave us? If all these things tug at our will with equal force, and all together at the same time, will not these

divergent inclinations put a great strain on the human heart, as we deliberate which to select? All are good, but they compete among themselves until one is chosen, to which the will, hitherto distracted between many options, may move as a united whole. So too when the joys of eternity call us from above, and pleasure in temporal prosperity holds us fast below, our one soul is in no state to embrace either with its entire will. Claimed by truth for the one, to the other clamped by custom, the soul is torn apart in its distress.

11. 25. Such was the sickness in which I agonized, blaming myself more sharply than ever, turning and twisting in my chain¹⁰⁰ as I strove to tear free from it completely, for slender indeed was the bond that still held me. But hold me it did. In my secret heart you stood by me, Lord, redoubling the lashes of fear and shame in the severity of your mercy, lest I give up the struggle and that slender, fragile bond that remained be not broken after all, but thicken again and constrict me more tightly. "Let it be now," I was saying to myself. "Now is the moment, let it be now," and merely by saying this I was moving toward the decision. I would almost achieve it, but then fall just short; yet I did not slip right down to my starting-point, but stood aside to get my breath back. Then I would make a fresh attempt, and now I was almost there, almost there.... I was touching the goal, grasping it ... and then I was not there, not touching, not grasping it. I shrank from dying to death and living to life, for ingrained evil was more powerful in me than new-grafted good. The nearer it came, that moment when I would be changed, the more it pierced me with terror. Dismayed, but not quite dislodged, I was left hanging.

26. The frivolity of frivolous aims, the futility of futile pursuits,¹⁰¹ these things that had been my cronies of long standing,¹⁰² still held me back, plucking softly at my garment of flesh and murmuring in my ear, "Do you mean to get rid of us? Shall we never be your companions again after that moment ... never ... never again? From that time onward so-and-so will be forbidden to you, all your life long." And what was it that they were reminding me of by those words, "so-and-so," O my God, what were they bringing to my mind? May your mercy banish such memories far from me!

100. A possible echo of Persius, *Satire* V, 127, from which he quotes in the following chapter.

101. See Eccl 1:2; 12:8.

102. *Antique amicae meae*: not former female friends, as translators have sometimes taken it. This is the beginning of the personification he uses to make the struggle vivid; see "Continence" in VIII, 11, 27.

What foul deeds were they not hinting at, what disgraceful exploits! But now their voices were less than half as loud, for they no longer confronted me directly to argue their case, but muttered behind my back and slyly tweaked me as I walked away, trying to make me look back. Yet they did slow me down, for I could not bring myself to tear free and shake them off and leap across to that place whither I was summoned, while aggressive habit still taunted me: "Do you imagine you will be able to live without these things?"

27. The taunts had begun to sound much less persuasive, however; for a revelation was coming to me from that country toward which I was facing, but into which I trembled to cross. There I beheld the chaste, dignified figure of Continence. Calm and cheerful was her manner, though modest,¹⁰³ pure and honorable her charm as she coaxed me to come and hesitate no longer, stretching kindly hands to welcome and embrace me, hands filled with a wealth of heartening examples. A multitude of boys and girls were there, a great concourse of youth and persons of every age, venerable widows and women grown old in their virginity, and in all of them I saw that this same Continence was by no means sterile, but the fruitful mother of children¹⁰⁴ conceived in joy from you, her Bridegroom. She was smiling at me, but with a challenging smile, as though to say, "Can you not do what these men have done, these women? Could any of them achieve it by their own strength, without the Lord their God? He it was, the Lord their God, who granted me to them. Why try to stand by yourself, only to lose your footing? Cast yourself on him and do not be afraid: he will not step back and let you fall. Cast yourself upon him trustfully; he will support and heal you." And I was bitterly ashamed, because I could still hear the murmurs of those frivolities, and I was still in suspense, still hanging back. Again she appealed to me, as though urging, "Close your ears against those unclean parts of you which belong to the earth¹⁰⁵ and let them be put to death. They tell you titillating tales, but have nothing to do with the law of the Lord your God."¹⁰⁶

All this argument in my heart raged only between myself and myself. Alypius stood fast at my side, silently awaiting the outcome of my unprecedented agitation.

103. Compare the cheerful young man in III, 11, 19.

104. See Ps 112(113):9.

105. See Col 3:5; the unquoted part of the context lists the relevant vices.

106. See Ps 118(119):85.

12, 28. But as this deep meditation dredged all my wretchedness up from the secret profundity of my being and heaped it all together before the eyes of my heart, a huge storm blew up within me and brought on a heavy rain of tears. In order to pour them out unchecked with the sobs that accompanied them I arose and left Alypius, for solitude seemed to me more suitable for the business of weeping. I withdrew far enough to ensure that his presence—even his—would not be burdensome to me. This was my need, and he understood it, for I think I had risen to my feet and blurted out something, my voice already choked with tears. He accordingly remained, in stunned amazement, at the place where we had been sitting. I flung myself down somehow under a fig-tree¹⁰⁷ and gave free rein to the tears that burst from my eyes like rivers, as an acceptable sacrifice to you.¹⁰⁸ Many things I had to say to you, and the gist of them, though not the precise words, was: “O Lord, how long?¹⁰⁹ How long? Will you be angry for ever? Do not remember our age-old sins.”¹¹⁰ For by these I was conscious of being held prisoner. I uttered cries of misery: “Why must I go on saying, ‘Tomorrow ... tomorrow’?¹¹¹ Why not now? Why not put an end to my depravity this very hour?”

“Pick it up and read”

29. I went on talking like this and weeping in the intense bitterness of my broken heart.¹¹² Suddenly I heard a voice from a house nearby—perhaps a voice of some boy or girl, I do not know—singing over and over again, “Pick it up and read, pick it up and read.” My expression immediately altered and I began to think hard whether children ordinarily repeated a ditty like this in any sort of game, but I could not recall ever having heard it anywhere else. I stemmed the flood of tears and rose to my feet, believing that this could be nothing other than a divine command to

107. Did he really note the species? It is more likely that he calls it a fig-tree for the sake of the symbolism: in Gn 3:7 Adam and Eve in the newly-discovered shame of their sin use fig-leaves to make loincloths; in Mt 21:19 (=Mk 11:13-14) Jesus curses a sterile fig-tree, which withers away. Hence the fig-tree can stand for the sinful, carnal condition condemned to die. But in Jn 1:47-48 Jesus sees Nathanael under a fig-tree, and calls him thence to grace and ultimate vision.

108. See Ps 50:19(51:17).

109. See Ps 6:4(3).

110. See Ps 78(79):5,8.

111. This seems to be an allusion to Persius, *Satire* V,66-69, but the Latin sound, *cras, cras,* resembled the raucous cry of a crow, as Augustine remarks in his *Exposition of Psalm* 102, 16; see Sermon 224,4,4.

112. See Ps 50:19(51:17).

open the Book and read the first passage I chanced upon; for I had heard the story of how Antony had been instructed by a gospel text. He happened to arrive while the gospel was being read, and took the words to be addressed to himself when he heard, *Go and sell all you possess and give the money to the poor: you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.*¹¹³ So he was promptly converted to you by this plainly divine message. Stung into action, I returned to the place where Alypius was sitting, for on leaving it I had put down there the book of the apostle’s letters. I snatched it up, opened it and read in silence the passage on which my eyes first lighted: *Not in dissipation and drunkenness, nor in debauchery and lewdness, nor in arguing and jealousy; but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh or the gratification of your desires.*¹¹⁴ I had no wish to read further, nor was there need. No sooner had I reached the end of the verse than the light of certainty flooded my heart and all dark shades of doubt fled away.

Conversion of Augustine and Alypius; Monica’s joy

30. I closed the book, marking the place with a finger between the leaves or by some other means, and told Alypius what had happened. My face was peaceful now. He in return told me what had been happening to him without my knowledge. He asked to see what I had read: I showed him, but he looked further than my reading had taken me. I did not know what followed, but the next verse was *Make room for the person who is weak in faith.*¹¹⁵ He referred this text to himself and interpreted it to me. Confirmed by this admonition he associated himself with my decision and good purpose without any upheaval or delay, for it was entirely in harmony with his own moral character, which for a long time now had been far, far better than mine.

We went indoors and told my mother, who was overjoyed. When we related to her how it had happened she was filled with triumphant delight

113. Mt 19:21; see Athanasius, *Life of Antony* 2.

114. Rom 13:13-14. Since Book VII the central issue for Augustine has been acceptance of Christ; this now crystallizes into the “putting on” of Christ in baptism, sacramentally symbolized by the clothing in the new robe.

115. Rom 14:1.

and blessed you, who have power to do more than we ask or understand,¹¹⁶ for she saw that you had granted her much more in my regard than she had been wont to beg of you in her wretched, tearful groaning. Many years earlier you had shown her a vision of me standing on the rule of faith;¹¹⁷ and now indeed I stood there, no longer seeking a wife or entertaining any worldly hope, for you had converted me to yourself. In so doing you had also converted her grief into a joy¹¹⁸ far more abundant than she had desired, and much more tender and chaste than she could ever have looked to find in grandchildren from my flesh.

Book IX

Death and Rebirth

1. O Lord, I am your servant, I am your servant and your handmaid's son. You burst my bonds asunder, and to you will I offer a sacrifice of praise.¹ May my heart and tongue give praise to you, and all my bones cry out their question, "Who is like you, O Lord?"² Yes, let them ask, and then do you respond and say to my soul, "I am your salvation."³

But who am I, what am I? Is there any evil I have not committed in my deeds, or if not in deeds, then in my words, or if not in words, at least by willing it? But you, Lord, are good and merciful,⁴ and your right hand plumbed the depths of my death, draining the cesspool of corruption in my heart, so that I ceased to will all that I had been wont to will, and now willed what you willed.⁵ But where had my power of free decision been throughout those long, weary years, and from what depth, what hidden profundity, was it called forth in a moment, enabling me to bow my neck to your benign yoke and my shoulders to your light burden,⁶ O Christ Jesus, my helper and redeemer?⁷ How sweet did it suddenly seem to me to shrug off those sweet frivolities, and how glad I now was to get rid of them—I who had been loath to let them go! For it was you who cast them out from me, you, our real and all-surpassing sweetness. You cast them out and entered yourself to take their place, you who are lovelier than any pleasure, though not to flesh and blood, more lustrous than any light, yet more inward than is any secret intimacy, loftier than all honor, yet not to those

1. See Pss 115(116):16-17; 85(86):15-16.

2. See Ps 34(35):10.

3. See Ps 34(35):3.

4. See Ex 34:6; Ps 85(86):15.

5. See Mt 26:39; Mk 14:36.

6. See Mt 11:30.

7. See Ps 18:15(19:14). Here, so soon after his mention of the crucial text, *Put on the Lord Jesus Christ*, Augustine addresses Christ by this name for the only time in *The Confessions*.

116. See Eph 3:10.

117. See III,11,19.

118. See Ps 29:12(30:11).

forth fruit for you by patience,¹⁴⁹ to win him for you in the end. Inspire others, my Lord, my God,¹⁵⁰ inspire your servants who are my brethren, your children who are my masters, whom I now serve with heart and voice and pen, that as many of them as read this may remember Monica, your servant,¹⁵¹ at your altar, along with Patricius, sometime her husband. From their flesh you brought me into this life, though how I do not know. Let them remember with loving devotion these two who were my parents in this transitory light, but also were my brethren under you, our Father, within our mother the Catholic Church, and my fellow-citizens in the eternal Jerusalem, for which your people¹⁵² sighs with longing throughout its pilgrimage, from its setting out to its return. So may the last request she made of me be granted to her more abundantly by the prayers of many, evoked by my confessions, than by my prayers alone.

Book X

Memory

1. 1. Let me know you, O you who know me; then shall I know even as I am known.¹ You are the strength of my soul; make your way in and shape it to yourself, that it may be yours to have and to hold, free from stain or wrinkle.² I speak because this is my hope,³ and whenever my joy springs from that hope it is joy well founded. As for the rest of this life's experiences, the more tears are shed over them the less are they worth weeping over, and the more truly worth lamenting the less do we bewail them while mired in them. You love the truth⁴ because anyone who does truth comes to the light. Truth it is that I want to do, in my heart by confession in your presence, and with my pen before many witnesses.⁵

Motives for confession

2. 2. But the abyss of the human conscience lies naked to your eyes, O Lord,⁶ so would anything in me be secret even if I were unwilling to confess to you? I would be hiding you from myself, but not myself from you. But now that my groans bear witness that I find no pleasure in myself, you shed light upon me and give me joy, you offer yourself, lovable and longed for, that I may thrust myself away in disgust and choose you, and

149. See Lk 8:15.

150. See Jn 20:28.

151. This is the only mention of her name in Augustine's writings. The spelling here given has the best manuscript support.

152. See Heb 11:10.13.14.

1. See 1 Cor 13:12; 8:2-3; Gal 4:9.

2. See Eph 5:27.

3. See Ps 115(116):10; 2 Cor 4:13.

4. See Ps 50:8(51:6).

5. See Jn 3:21; Eph 4:15. The phrase "to do truth" is awkward in English, but no other captures the root meaning of the biblical word. "Truth" is originally what is real, genuine, reliable, trustworthy; it is a moral quality, above all of God, and of human beings who are like him. Only by extension from this does it come to mean accuracy of statement, a quality of speech.

6. See Sir 42:18-20; Heb 4:13.

be pleasing no more either to you or to myself except in what I have from you.

To you, then, Lord, I lie exposed, exactly as I am. I have spoken of what I hope to gain by confessing to you. My confession to you is made not with words of tongue and voice, but with the words of my soul and the clamor of my thought, to which your ear is attuned; for when I am bad, confession to you is simply disgust with myself, but when I am good, confession to you consists in not attributing my goodness to myself, because though you, Lord, bless the person who is just, it is only because you have first made him just when he was sinful.⁷ This is why, O my God, my confession in your presence is silent, yet not altogether silent: there is no noise to it, but it shouts by love. I can say nothing right to other people unless you have heard it from me first, nor can you even hear anything of the kind from me which you have not first told me.⁸

3.3. What point is there for me in other people hearing my confessions? Are they likely to heal my infirmities?⁹ A curious lot they are, eager to pry into the lives of others, but tardy when it comes to correcting their own. Why should they seek to hear from me what I am, when they are reluctant to hear from you what they are? And when they hear from me about myself, how do they know that I am speaking the truth, since no one knows what goes on inside a person except the spirit of that person within him?¹⁰ If, on the contrary, they hear from you about themselves, they will be in no position to say, "The Lord is lying." Is hearing the truth about oneself from you anything different from knowing oneself? And can anyone have this self-knowledge and still protest, "It is not true," unless he himself is lying?

Yet charity believes without stint,¹¹ at least among those who are bonded together by charity,¹² and so I also confess to you, Lord, in such a way that people to whom I can offer no proof may discern whether I confess truthfully. I cannot prove it, but all whose ears are open to me by love will believe me.

4. All the same, my inward healer, make clear to me what advantage there is in doing this. When the confession of my past evil deeds is read and

7. See Ps 5:13(12); Rom 4:5.

8. This sentence goes to the heart of what Augustine understands by truth and confession.

9. See Ps 102(103):3; Mt 4:23.

10. See 1 Cor 2:11.

11. See 1 Cor 13:7.

12. See Col 3:14.

listened to—those evil deeds which you have forgiven and covered over¹³ to make me glad in yourself, transforming my soul by faith and your sacrament—that recital arouses the hearer's heart, forbidding it to slump into despair and say, "I can't." Let it rather keep watch¹⁴ for your loving mercy and your gentle grace, through which every weak soul that knows its own weakness grows strong.¹⁵ It is cheering to good people to hear about the past evil deeds of those who are now freed from them: cheering not because the deeds were evil but because they existed once but exist no more.

But then what profit is there, O my Lord, to whom my conscience confesses every day, more secure in the hope of your mercy than in its own innocence—what profit is there, I ask, if through these writings I also confess to other people in your presence not what I have been, but what I still am? The desirability of confessing the past I have recognized and stated; but there are many people who desire to know what I still am at this time of writing my confessions, people who know me without really knowing me, people who have read my works or know me only by hearsay. None of these have laid their ears to my heart, though it is only there that I am whoever I am. They therefore want to hear from my own confession what I am within, where they can venture neither eye nor ear nor mind. They want to hear and are ready to believe me: will they really recognize me? Yes, because the charity that makes them good assures them that I am not lying when I confess about myself; that very charity in them believes me.

4.5. But what do they hope to gain, those who want this? Do they wish to congratulate me when they hear how much progress I am making toward you by your gift, and to pray for me when they hear how badly I am dragged back by my own weight? To people like that I will disclose myself, for it is no small gain, O Lord my God, if thanks are offered to you by many people on our account¹⁶ and many pray to you for us. Yes, let a fraternal mind love in me what you teach us to be worthy of love, and deplore in me what you teach us to be deplorable. But let it be a brotherly mind that does this, not the mind of a stranger, not the minds of alien foes

13. See Ps 31(32):1.

14. See Sg 5:2; Mt 25:1-13.

15. See 2 Cor 12:9-10.

16. See 2 Cor 1:11.

who mouth falsehood and whose power wrecks wickedness;¹⁷ let it be a brotherly mind which when it approves of me will rejoice over me, and when it disapproves will be saddened on my account, because whether it approves or disapproves it still loves me. To such people I will disclose myself: let them sigh with relief over my good actions, but with grief over my evil deeds. The good derive from you and are your gift; the evil are my sins and your punishments. Let them sigh with relief over the one and with grief over the other, and let both hymns and laments ascend into your presence from the hearts of my brethren, which are your censers.¹⁸ And then do you, Lord, in your delight at the fragrance which pervades your holy temple, have mercy on me according to your great mercy¹⁹ for the sake of your name.²⁰ Do not, I entreat you, do not abandon your unfinished work, but bring to perfection all that is wanting in me.²¹

6. So then, when I confess not what I have been but what I am now, this is the fruit to be reaped from my confessions: I confess not only before you in secret exultation tinged with fear²² and secret sorrow infused with hope, but also in the ears of believing men and women, the companions of my joy and sharers in my mortality, my fellow citizens still on pilgrimage with me, those who have gone before and those who will follow, and all who bear me company in my life. They are your servants and my brethren, but you have willed them to be your children and my masters, and you have ordered me to serve them if I wish to live with you and share your life. This command of yours would mean little to me if it were only spoken, and not first carried out in deed as well.²³ So I do likewise, and I do it in deeds and in words; I do it under your outstretched wings²⁴ and would do it in grave peril, were it not that under those wings my soul is surrendered to you²⁵ and to you my weakness known. I am a little child, but my Father lives for ever and in him I have a guardian suited to me. He who begot me is also he who

17. See Ps 143(144):11.

18. See Rv 8:3-4.

19. See Ps 50:3(51:1).

20. See Mt 10:22; 24:9; Jn 15:21.

21. See Phil 1:6.

22. See Ps 2:11.

23. See Jn 13:1-17.

24. See Pss 16(17):8; 35:8(36:7). This is possibly a reference to the outstretched arms of Christ, represented in Augustine's day as triumphant and glorious before the cross.

25. See Ps 61:2(62:1).

keeps me safe; you yourself are all the good I have, you are almighty and you are with me before ever I am with you.

To such people, then, the people you command me to serve, I will disclose myself not as I have been but as I am now, as I am still, though I do not judge myself.²⁶ In this way, then, let me be heard.

5. 7. For it is you, Lord, who judge me. No one knows what he himself is made of, except his own spirit within him,²⁷ yet there is still some part of him which remains hidden even from his own spirit; but you, Lord, know everything about a human being because you have made him. And though in your sight I may despise myself and reckon myself dust and ashes,²⁸ I know something about you which I do not know about myself. It is true that we now see only a tantalizing reflection in a mirror,²⁹ and so it is that while I am on pilgrimage far from you³⁰ I am more present to myself than to you; yet I do know that you cannot be defiled in any way whatever, whereas I do not know which temptations I may have the strength to resist, and to which ones I shall succumb. Our hope is that, because you are trustworthy, you do not allow us to be tempted more fiercely than we can bear, but along with the temptation you ordain the outcome of it, so that we can endure.³¹ Let me, then, confess what I know about myself, and confess too what I do not know, because what I know of myself I know only because you shed light on me, and what I do not know I shall remain ignorant about until my darkness becomes like bright noon before your face.³²

Looking for God in creatures

6. 8. I love you, Lord, with no doubtful mind but with absolute certainty. You pierced my heart with your word, and I fell in love with you. But the sky and the earth too, and everything in them—all these things around me are telling me that I should love you; and since they never cease to

26. See 1 Cor 4:3.

27. See 1 Cor 2:11.

28. See Jb 42:6; Sir 10:9; Gn 18:27.

29. See 1 Cor 13:12.

30. See 2 Cor 5:6.

31. See 1 Cor 10:13.

32. See Is 58:10; Ps 89(90):8.

proclaim this to everyone, those who do not hear are left without excuse.³³ But you, far above, will show mercy to anyone with whom you have already determined to deal mercifully, and will grant pity to whomsoever you choose.³⁴ Were this not so, the sky and the earth would be proclaiming your praises to the deaf.

But what am I loving when I love you? Not beauty of body nor transient grace, not this fair light which is now so friendly to my eyes, not melodious song in all its lovely harmonies, not the sweet fragrance of flowers or ointments or spices, not manna or honey, not limbs that draw me to carnal embrace: none of these do I love when I love my God. And yet I do love a kind of light, a kind of voice, a certain fragrance, a food and an embrace, when I love my God: a light, voice, fragrance, food and embrace for my inmost self, where something limited to no place shines into my mind, where something not snatched away by passing time sings for me, where something no breath blows away yields to me its scent, where there is savor undiminished by famished eating, and where I am clasped in a union from which no satiety can tear me away. This is what I love, when I love my God.

9. And what is this?

I put my question to the earth, and it replied, "I am not he"; I questioned everything it held, and they confessed the same. I questioned the sea and the great deep,³⁵ and the teeming live creatures that crawl,³⁶ and they replied, "We are not God; seek higher." I questioned the gusty winds, and every breeze with all its flying creatures told me, "Anaximenes was wrong: I am not God."³⁷ To the sky I put my question, to sun, moon, stars, but they denied me: "We are not the God you seek." And to all things which stood around the portals of my flesh I said, "Tell me of my God." You are not he, but tell me something of him." Then they lifted up their mighty voices and cried,

33. See Rom 1:20.

34. See Rom 9:15; Ex 33:19.

35. See Jb 28:14.

36. See Gn 1:20.

37. Anaximenes of Miletus, sixth century B.C., had taught that all things came from air.

"He made us."³⁸

My questioning was my attentive spirit, and their reply, their beauty.

Then toward myself I turned, and asked myself, "Who are you?" And I answered my own question: "A man." See, here are the body and soul that make up myself, the one outward and the other within. Through which of these should I seek my God? With my body's senses I had already sought him from earth to heaven, to the farthest place whither I could send the darting rays of my eyes;³⁹ but what lay within me was better, and to this all those bodily messengers reported back, for it controlled and judged the replies of sky and earth, and of all the creatures dwelling in them, all those who had proclaimed, "We are not God," and "He made us." My inner self⁴⁰ recognized them all through the service of the outer. I, who was that inmost self, I, who was mind, knew them through the senses of my body; and so I questioned the vast frame of the world concerning my God, and it answered, "I am not he, but he made me."⁴¹

10. Surely this beauty is apparent to all whose faculties are sound? Why, then, does it not speak the same message to all? Animals, both small and large, see the beauty, but they are not able to question it, for in them reason does not hold sway as judge over the reports of the senses. Human beings have the power to question, so that by understanding the things he has made they may glimpse the unseen things of God;⁴² but by base love they subject themselves to these creatures, and once subject can no longer judge.⁴³ Creatures do not respond to those who question unless the questioners are also judges: not that they change their voice—that is, their beauty—if one person merely sees it, while another sees and inquires, as though they would appear in one guise to the former, and differently to the latter; no, the beauty appears in the same way to both beholders, but to one it is dumb, and to the other it speaks. Or rather, it speaks to all, but only they understand who test the voice heard outwardly against the truth

38. See Ps 99(100):3.

39. Sight, unlike hearing, is a very active sense for Augustine; see Sermon 277,10,10.

40. See Rom 7:22; 2 Cor 4:16; Eph 3:16.

41. Plotinus speaks similarly of an ascent to the archetype through the beauty of creatures; see *Enneads* V,1,4.

42. See Rom 1:20.

43. See Plotinus, *Enneads* V,1,1: to pursue a being alien to one's own nature is to admit oneself inferior to it. A slave cannot be judge.

within.⁴⁴ Truth tells me, “Neither earth nor sky nor any bodily thing is your God.” Their own nature avers it. Do you not see, my soul? Nature is an extended mass, smaller in any one part than in the whole. Even you, my soul, are better than that, for you impart energy to the mass of your body and endow it with life, and no corporeal thing can do that for any other corporeal thing. But your God is to you the life of your life itself.⁴⁵

7. 11. What is it, then, that I love when I love my God? Who is he who towers above my soul? By this same soul I will mount to him. I will leave behind that faculty whereby I am united to a body and animate its frame. Not by that faculty do I find my God, for horse and mule would find him equally, since the same faculty gives life to their bodies too, yet they are beasts who lack intelligence.⁴⁶

There is another power by which I do more than give life to my flesh: with this I endow with senses the flesh that God has fashioned for me, commanding the eye not to hear and the ear not to see, giving to my organ of seeing and my organ of hearing and to all my other senses what is proper to them in their respective places and for their particular work. Their functions are diverse, but I, the one mind, act through them all. This power too I will leave behind, for horse and mule have it too, since they also have sensory organs throughout their bodies.

Looking for God in himself: the fields of memory

8. 12. So then, I will leave behind that faculty of my nature, and mount by stages toward him who made me.

Now I arrive in the fields and vast mansions of memory, where are treasured innumerable images brought in there from objects of every conceiv-

44. That is, probably Truth, the incarnate Word, present in the believer through faith and baptism. Plotinus also held that a mind, in us but not our own, enables us to discern truth; see *Enneads* V, 1.10; 3.3. Of the Neo-Platonists Augustine later said in *The City of God* VIII, 7, “They declared that the light of our minds is God himself, through whom all things were made.”

45. This chapter is not an “argument for the existence of God”: Augustine takes as his premise that God created the universe. His interest is a moral one. To discern the beauty and nature of God through created beauty requires righteousness of heart and well-ordered love. Inordinate love of creatures debases them and deprives the human viewer of the power to judge rightly. Augustine speaks elsewhere of our power to endow an otherwise dumb creation with its voice, so that it too can praise its creator; see *Exposition of Psalm* 144, 13-14.

46. See Ps 31(32):9.

able kind perceived by the senses.⁴⁷ There too are hidden away the modified images we produce when by our thinking we magnify or diminish or in any way alter the information our senses have reported. There too is everything else that has been consigned and stowed away, and not yet engulfed and buried in oblivion. Sojourning there I command something I want to present itself, and immediately certain things emerge, while others have to be pursued for some time and dug out from remote crannies. Others again come tumbling out in disorderly profusion, and leap into prominence as though asking, “Are we what you want?” when it is something different that I am asking for and trying to recall. With my mental hand I push them out of the way of my effort to remember, until what I want becomes clear and breaks from cover. Then there are remembered items that come to hand easily and in orderly sequence as soon as they are summoned, the earlier members giving way to those that follow and returning to their storage-places, ready to be retrieved next time I need them. All of which happens when I recite anything from memory.

13. Preserved there, classified and distinct, are all those impressions which have been admitted through the entrances proper to each: light, colors and bodily shapes through the eye; all kinds of sound through the ears; various odors through the gateways of the nostrils; flavors through the entrance of the mouth; and through the pervasive sense of touch whatever is felt as hard or soft, hot or cold, smooth or rough, heavy or light, external to the body or inside it. The huge repository of the memory, with its secret and unimaginable caverns, welcomes and keeps all these things, to be recalled and brought out for use when needed; and as all of them have their particular ways into it, so all are put back again in their proper places.

The sense-impressions themselves do not find their way in, however; it is the images of things perceived by the senses that are available there to the person who recalls them. Who can tell how these images are fashioned, obvious though it may be through which senses they were captured and stowed away within? For when I am sitting quietly in the dark I can bring up colors in my memory if I wish, and distinguish white from black and any others I select. No sounds burst in to intrude on these images acquired through my eyes, which I am considering, though sounds too are present

47. *Memoria* for Augustine connotes something vaster than what we mean by “memory,” though it includes this. As the following chapters make clear, consideration of it is a vital part of his quest for authentic self-knowledge. See the Introduction.

there, lying hidden and stored in a place by themselves. I can summon them equally well, if I wish, and find them present at once, and though my tongue and throat are silent I sing as much as I like. Images of color, which are just as truly present, do not thrust themselves in on my song or interrupt it while I am enjoying this other treasure, which has flowed into me through my ears. Similarly I can recall at will anything drawn in and hoarded by way of my other senses. I can distinguish the scent of lilies from violets even though I am not actually smelling anything, and honey from grape-juice, smooth from rough, without tasting or feeling anything: I am simply passing them in review before my mind by remembering them.

14. This I do within myself in the immense court of my memory; for there sky and earth and sea are readily available to me, together with everything that I have ever been able to perceive in them, apart from what I have forgotten. And there I come to meet myself.⁴⁸ I recall myself, what I did, when and where I acted in a certain way, and how I felt about so acting. Everything is there which I remember having experienced for myself or believed on the assertion of others. Moreover, I can draw on this abundant store to form imaginary pictures which resemble the things I have myself experienced, or believed because my own experience confirmed them, and weave these together with images from the past, and so evoke future actions, occurrences or hopes; and on all these as well I can meditate as though they were present to me. In that same enormous recess of my mind, thronging with so many great images, I say to myself, "That's what I will do!" And the action I have envisaged follows. "Oh, if only this or that could be! Pray God this or that may not happen!" I say to myself, and even as I say it the images of all these things of which I speak pass before me, coming from the same treasure-house of memory. If they were not there, I would be quite unable to conjure up such possibilities.⁴⁹

15. This faculty of memory is a great one, O my God, exceedingly great, a vast, infinite recess. Who can plumb its depth? This is a faculty of my mind, belonging to my nature, yet I cannot myself comprehend all that I am. Is the mind, then, too narrow to grasp itself, forcing us to ask where

48. That is, memory is the place of self-awareness.

49. The memory contributes images which can be combined in ever-new ways, the raw material for imaginative construction.

that part of it is which it is incapable of grasping? Is it outside the mind, not inside? How can the mind not compass it?

Enormous wonder wells up within me when I think of this, and I am dumbfounded. People go to admire lofty mountains, and huge breakers at sea, and crashing waterfalls, and vast stretches of ocean, and the dance of the stars, but they leave themselves behind out of sight. It does not strike them as wonderful that I could enumerate those things without seeing them with my eyes, and that I could not even have spoken of them unless I could within my mind contemplate mountains and waves and rivers and stars (which I have seen), and the ocean (which I only take on trust), and contemplate them there in spaces just as vast as though I were seeing them outside myself. But I did not suck them into myself when I looked at them with my eyes, for it was not these things themselves that entered me, but only the images of them; and I know which impressions were made on me through which of my bodily senses.

9. 16. The immense spaces of my memory harbor even more than these, however. Here too are all those things which I received through a liberal education and have not yet forgotten; they are stored away in some remote inner place, which yet is not really a place at all. However, in this case it is not images of the realities that I harbor, but the realities themselves; for everything I know about literature, or skill in debate, or how many kinds of questions can logically be formulated, lodges indeed in my memory, but not like an image which remains after I have turned away from some object perceived externally, nor like the trace of a sound that has faded, by means of which a voice that has penetrated my ears can still be recalled as though audible when it is audible no longer, nor like a fleeting scent that is blown away by the wind after affecting our nostrils, but leaves an image of itself in the memory which we can savor again later by remembering it, nor like food, which is certainly no longer present as a flavor in the stomach but can still be tasted in the memory, nor like anything which is felt by bodily touch and can still be touched by our memory when the object is no longer in contact with our bodies. None of these objects is admitted into the memory in its own right; only the images of them are captured with astonishing speed, put away in wonderful compartments, and brought out again in a wonderful way when we recall them.

10. 17. When I hear that there are three classes of questions—namely, whether something exists, what it is, and what qualities belong to it—I

do, to be sure, retain images of the sounds by which these words are composed; and I know that those sounds were borne upon the breeze with some noise, but have now fallen silent. But through no bodily sense whatever have I made contact with the realities themselves, for I have never seen these realities anywhere except in my own mind. What I have stowed away in my memory is not the images of these things but the things themselves. Let them say how they found their way into me if they can, for when I check every physical gateway in myself I find none by which they can have entered. My eyes tell me, "If those things were colored, it was we who reported them"; my ears declare, "If they made some sound, we gave you the information"; my nostrils say, "If there was a smell to them, we let them through"; my sense of taste replies, "If they had no flavor, don't ask me"; touch says, "If they had no bodily substance, I did not handle them, and if I did not handle them, I told you nothing." From what source and by what route did they enter my memory? I do not know, for when I learned them I did not take them on trust from some stranger's intelligence but recognized them as present in my own, and affirmed them as true, and entrusted them to my memory for safekeeping so that I could bring them out again when I wished. This means that they were there even before I learned them, but not remembered. Where and why did I recognize them and say, "Yes, that's how it is; that is true," when these things were stated? Surely because they were already in my memory, but so remote, so hidden from sight in concealed hollows, that unless they had been dug out by someone who reminded me, I would perhaps never have been able to think about them.⁵⁰

11. 18. We are therefore led to conclude that when we learn things which are not imbibed through the senses as images, but are known directly in their own reality inside the mind, as they are in themselves, and without the intervention of images, we are collecting by means of our thought those things which the memory already held, but in a scattered and disorderly way. By applying our minds to them we ensure that they are stacked ready-to-hand in the memory, where they may be easily available for habitual use, instead of lying hidden, dispersed and neglected, as

50. In *Meno* 81 D, Plato says that learning is simply remembering. Augustine seems to espouse the same view here; but in his *Revisions* I, 8, 2 (with reference to *The Greatness of the Soul* 20,34) he disclaims any theory of the soul's existence prior to its infusion into its particular body.

hitherto. How many things of this kind are carried in my memory! Such things have been found and placed ready-to-hand in the way I have described, and so it is said that we have learned them and now we know them. If I have ceased to recall them for a fair stretch of time they sink back again and slip away into distant caverns, and then they need to be pulled from the same places (for there is no other home for them) as though newly thought out, and herded together⁵¹ to become knowable once more: that is to say they need to be collected again,⁵² which is why we call this activity cogitating,⁵³ or collecting one's thoughts. *Cogo* is related to *cogito* as *ago* is to *agito* and *facio* to *factito*.⁵⁴ The mind, however, has claimed this verb as properly applicable to itself, so that only what is "collected," within the mind, what is "herded together" there, and there only, is properly said to be "thought."

12. 19. The memory also stores countless truths and laws of mathematics and mensuration, no single one of which was impressed upon it by bodily sense, for they have no color, sound or smell, nor have they been tasted or handled. I heard the sound of the words that indicated these truths when they were under discussion, but the sounds are one thing and the truths themselves something else. The words sound one way in Greek and differently in Latin, but the truths are neither Greek nor Latin, nor spoken entities of any kind. I have seen a draughtsman's geometric lines, and even though they are infinitely fine, like a spider's thread, the mathematical lines they represent are something quite different, not the images of those lines which my fleshly eye has observed. Everyone knows these truths, without a physical representation of any kind being involved. One recognizes them within oneself. With all my bodily senses I have apprehended the numbers of things as we count them; but the principle of number is something entirely different, and without it we could not think mathematically at all. This principle is not an image of the things counted, and there-

51. *Cogenda*.

52. *Conligenda*.

53. *Cogitare*.

54. The etymology is from Varro. The Latin suffix *-ito* signifies an intensification or frequent repetition of the action expressed by the simple verb. Augustine thus derives *cogito*, think, from *cogo*, force, drive, herd together, and associates them both with *colligo* or *conligo*, collect, gather.

fore has a much more real existence.⁵⁵ Let anyone who cannot see it laugh at me, but allow me to pity him for laughing.

13, 20. Not only do I retain all these things in my memory: I can also keep in my memory the way in which I learned them. I have heard many completely erroneous arguments urged against them, and these too I retain in my memory. Erroneous they were, yet my memory is not in error as I recall them. Further, I can remember discriminating between the truth and those erroneous arguments against it, and I see that my discrimination between them today is distinct from the discrimination I often practiced at various times in the past when I thought about them. So I remember that I have often understood these matters, and I also store in my memory what I discern and understand now, so that later on I may remember that I understood it today. It follows that I have the power to remember that I remembered, just as later, if I recall that I have been able to remember these things now, I shall undoubtedly be recalling it through the faculty of memory.

14, 21. The same memory also records emotions previously experienced in the mind, not in the same way as the mind experienced them at the time, but in the mode proper to the power of memory. I remember having been happy, without feeling happy now; I recall my past sadness but feel no sadness in so doing; I remember having been afraid once, but am not frightened as I remember; I summon the memory of how I once wanted something, but without wanting it today. Sometimes the opposite emotion is present: I can happily remember some sadness I suffered which is now over and done with, or sadly recall lost happiness. There is nothing strange about this where the previous experience was one that simply involved the body, for the mind is one thing and the body another; it is therefore unremarkable if in my mind I joyfully recall some former bodily pain. Mind and memory, however, are one and the same. This is why when we instruct someone to remember a point we say, "Be sure to bear that in mind"; and when we forget we say, "I didn't have my mind on it" or "It slipped my mind." So we call memory itself "mind." This being the case, how does it happen that when I happily recall my past sadness, my mind is experiencing joy while my memory is of sorrow, and yet while the mind is happy

55. The distinction between numbers as handled by the senses and ideal or intelligible numbers goes back to Pythagoras and is present in Plato and Plotinus. It was important to Augustine from his early works *Order* and *Answer to the Skeptics* and especially *Music* (VI,16), where he relates it to our sense of rhythm.

in the joy it contains, the memory is not saddened by the sadness in it? Does the memory not belong to the mind? Who would maintain that? It is truer to say that the memory is like the mind's stomach, while joy and sorrow are like delicious or bitter food. When they are committed to memory they are transferred to the stomach, as it were, and can be kept there, but cannot be tasted. It is absurd to think the operations of memory and stomach are really alike, yet they are not in all respects dissimilar.⁵⁶

22. But now suppose I produce something else from my memory: I state that there are four passions that disturb the soul—desire, joy, fear and sadness; for purposes of disputation I state whatever analysis of them I have formulated by dividing each according to species and genus; I find in my memory what I am to say and it is from there that I produce my statement; yet when I run through these passions from memory I suffer no emotional disturbance from any of them. Before they were recalled and brought out for inspection they were there: that is why they could be fetched by the act of remembrance. Perhaps, then, these things are produced from the memory in the same way that cattle can bring food back from the stomach for chewing the cud. But in that case why does the disputant (that is, the person who remembers) not taste the sweetness of joy or the bitterness of grief in the mouth of his thought? Or is this precisely the point of difference between two activities, the point where the analogy breaks down? Who indeed would discuss these passions if every time we mentioned sadness or fear we were forced to mourn or feel frightened? And yet we would be in no position to discuss them unless we found in our memory not just the sound of their names, as images derived from sense-impressions, but the very notions of the things themselves. These we have received through no gateway of the flesh; the mind itself has become aware of them by undergoing its emotions and has committed them to memory, or else the memory has retained them of its own accord, though they were not expressly entrusted to it.

15, 23. It is not easy to say whether this process occurs with the help of images or not. I speak of a stone, or the sun, when these objects are not present to my senses, and unquestionably the images of them are available in my memory. I name a bodily pain: it is not present to me, because

56. Memory is mind engaged in particular activities. Augustine seems to come very close here to identifying memory with mind; probably he did not, but he thought of memory as both the focus of personal identity and our link between past, present and future.

nothing is hurting; but unless the image of it resided in my memory I would not know how to speak of it, nor would I be able in an argument to distinguish it from pleasure. I name bodily health when I am myself in a healthy condition; in this case the object itself is present to me, yet if its image were not also retained in my memory I would be quite unable to recall what the sound of its name signified; and similarly sick people would not know the meaning of any statement about health if the same image were not retained by the power of memory, even though the thing itself is lacking in their bodies.⁵⁷

When I speak of "numbers"—ideal numbers in the light of which we count—it is not the images of them that are present in my memory but the numbers themselves. I speak of "the image of the sun," and this is precisely what is in my memory, for what I recall is not an image of that image, but the primary image itself: it is this which springs to mind immediately in my act of remembering. I name "memory," and recognize what I am naming; but where can this act of recognition take place, except in the memory? Does this mean that memory is present to itself through its image, and not in itself?

16. 24. Now when I name "forgetfulness" and similarly recognize the thing I am naming, whence comes my recognition, if not from an act of remembering? I do not mean recognition of the sound of its name, but of the thing signified, for if I forgot that, I would be unable to recognize the meaning of the word. So when I remember "memory," memory itself immediately makes itself available; but when I remember "forgetfulness," both memory and forgetfulness are promptly present: memory since by means of it I remember, and forgetfulness since that is what I am remembering. But what else is forgetfulness but loss of memory? How then can it be present so that I can remember it, when its very presence deprives me of the power to remember? What we remember, we retain in our memory. If we did not remember forgetfulness, we would never recognize the reality which is being referred to when we hear its name; hence forgetfulness is retained by the memory. It must be present, otherwise we would forget it, yet when it is present we forget! Are we to understand, then, that forgetfulness is not in itself present in the memory when we remember it, but present only through its image, since if it were immediately present in its reality it would make us

57. So it is in memory that we connect signs with the objects signified, and this holds whether the objects are present or not.

forget, not remember?⁵⁸ In the end, who can fathom this matter, who understand how the mind works?

25. This much is certain, Lord, that I am laboring over it, laboring over myself, and I have become for myself a land hard to till and of heavy sweat.⁵⁹ We are not in this instance gazing at the expanses of the sky⁶⁰ or calculating the distances between stars or the weight of the earth;⁶¹ the person who remembers is myself; I am my mind.⁶² It is not surprising that whatever is not myself should be remote, but what can be nearer to me than I am to myself? Yet here I am, unable to comprehend the nature of my memory, when I cannot even speak of myself without it. How am I to explain it, when I am quite certain that I remember forgetting? Am I to say that something I remember is not in my memory? Or am I to say that forgetfulness is in my memory for the very purpose of preventing me from forgetting? Either alternative is completely absurd.

Is there a third possibility? I might say that when I remember "forgetfulness" it is only the image of forgetfulness that is held in my memory, not forgetfulness itself. But what right have I to make that assertion, in view of the fact that when an image of something is imprinted upon the memory, the thing itself must have been present first, so that the image can be derived from it and imprinted? That is how I remember Carthage; that is how I remember all the places where I have been and the faces of people I have met, and that is how I remember all the information reported by my other senses, and the health or pain of my own body: when these objects were to hand my memory abstracted from them images which I would be able to contemplate as truly present and review in my mind, when later I remembered those objects in their absence. It would follow, then, that if "forgetfulness" is kept in the memory not in its own reality but by means of its image, it would need to have been present so that its image could be

58. The argument is not rigorous: the connotation of *oblivio* (forgetfulness) as Augustine here uses it shifts between a particular instance of forgetting something (which we can be well aware of when it has occurred, and be distressed about, and hence remember as we can other mental events) and a generalized, almost hypostatized, forgetting which would mean a complete blotting out of all memory. But the discussion serves his purpose of provoking himself and his readers to wonder at the mysteries of the human mind, through which he ascends to the mystery of God.

59. See Gn 3:17,19; and Augustine's discovery of himself as a land of famine, II,10,18, and a great enigma, IV,4,9.

60. Echo of Ennius, *Iphigeneia*, quoted by Cicero, *On Divination* II,30.

61. See Jb 28:25 (Old Latin).

62. Again he seems to identify memory, mind, and self.

abstracted. But when it was present, how did it inscribe its image in my memory, when its very presence blotted out even what it found already registered there?

Nonetheless in some way, some way which is incomprehensible and defies explanation, I am certain that I do remember forgetfulness—that very forgetfulness beneath which what we remember is submerged.

17. 26. O my God, profound, infinite complexity, what a great faculty memory is, how awesome a mystery! It is the mind, and this is nothing other than my very self. What am I, then, O my God? What is my nature? It is teeming life of every conceivable kind, and exceedingly vast. See, in the measureless plains and vaults and caves of my memory, immeasurably full of countless kinds of things which are there either through their images (as with material things), or by being themselves present (as is the knowledge acquired through a liberal education), or by registering themselves and making their mark in some indefinable way (as with emotional states which the memory retains even when the mind is not actually experiencing them, although whatever is in the memory must be in the mind too)—in this wide land I am made free of all of them, free to run and fly to and fro, to penetrate as deeply as I can, to collide with no boundary anywhere. So great is the faculty of memory, so great the power of life in a person whose life is tending toward death!

What shall I do, then, O my God, my true life? I will pass beyond this faculty of mine called memory, I will pass beyond it and continue resolutely toward you, O lovely Light.⁶³ What are you saying to me? See, I am climbing through my mind to you who abide high above me; I will pass beyond even this faculty of mine which is called memory in my longing to touch you from that side whence you can be touched, and cleave to you in the way in which holding fast to you is possible. For animals and birds also have memories; they would not otherwise return to their accustomed lairs and nests, rather than randomly to others, and indeed they would never be able to grow accustomed to anything without memory. I will therefore pass beyond memory and try to touch him who marked me out from the four-footed beasts and made me wiser than the birds in the sky;⁶⁴ yes, I will pass beyond even my memory that I may find you ... where? O my true good, O sweetness that will never fail me, that I may find you ... where? If I find you somewhere beyond my memory, that means that I shall be

63. See Eccl 11:7.

64. See Jb 35:11 (Old Latin).

forgetful of you. And how shall I find you, once I am no longer mindful of you?

18. 27. A woman had lost a coin; she searched for it with a lamp,⁶⁵ and unless she had had some memory of it she would not have found it, for when it was found, how could she have known that this was it, if she did not remember it? I remember losing many things myself, and looking for them and finding them, and this is how I know, because when I was searching for one or another of them, and someone said to me, "Perhaps this is it?" or "Is that it?" I went on saying, "No, that's not it," until what I was looking for was offered to me. Unless I had remembered that thing, whatever it was, I would not have found it even when it was handed to me, because I would not have recognized it. This is what always happens when we look for something we have lost and then find it. If some article chances to drop out of view, but not out of memory, such as any kind of visible object, the image of it persists within us and the thing is sought until it comes to light again; and when it has been found it is recognized by comparison with this inward image. We do not say that we have found the lost object unless we recognize it, and we cannot recognize it if we do not remember it. The thing had disappeared from our sight, but was held in our memory.

19. 28. What follows? When the memory itself loses some item, as for instance when we forget something and try to remember, where are we to search in the end but in the memory itself? And if some other thing is offered us there, we brush it aside, until the thing we are looking for turns up. When it does, we say, "That's it!" which we would not be in a position to say if we did not recognize the object, and we could not recognize it if we did not remember it. Yet we had undoubtedly forgotten. Is this the explanation: that the thing had not fallen out of the memory entirely? Can it be that the part which was retained gave a clue to the part which had vanished,⁶⁶ because the memory was aware that some item was absent from the full complement it was used to turning over and, feeling itself to be lame and lacking something that normally belonged to it, demanded that the missing element be restored? Suppose we see with our eyes or consider in our mind a certain person known to us, but cannot remember his name, and try to recall it. Any other name that presents itself will seem

65. See Lk 15:8.

66. As when we are trying to recall someone's name, and feel sure of the first letter.

quite irrelevant to him, because we are not used to associating him with that, and so we reject it. Then at last the right one comes up, and this fits satisfactorily with ... our habitual knowledge of the person. From where does it emerge, if not from the memory itself? This must be the case, because even if someone else reminds us, we recognize it again only because it springs from our memory: we do not believe what we are told as though this were a piece of fresh information, but remember and agree that what we have just been told is correct. If it has been entirely blotted out from the mind, we do not remember even when reminded. If we remember that we have forgotten something, we have not forgotten it entirely. But if we have forgotten altogether, we shall not be in a position to search for it.

Universal desire for happiness

20. 29. How then am I to seek you, Lord? When I seek you, my God, what I am seeking is a life of happiness.⁶⁷ Let me seek you that my soul may live,⁶⁸ for as my body draws its life from my soul, so does my soul draw its life from you. How, then, am I to seek a life of happiness? It is not mine until I can say, "This is all I want; here is happiness." I must know how to seek it. Should it be by way of remembering, as though it were something I have forgotten but am still aware of having forgotten? Or by thirsting for a life still strange to me, either because I have never known it or because I have so completely forgotten that I do not even remember that I have forgotten? What is a life of happiness? Surely what everyone wants, absolutely everyone without exception?⁶⁹ But if they all want it so badly, where did they come to know it? Where have they seen it, that they are so enamored of it? Evidently we possess it in some fashion. A person who possesses it is happy in one way, actually happy; in a different manner others are made happy by hoping for happiness. These latter possess happiness in a less perfect way than the former, who are happy in the reality itself, but they are better off than people who are happy neither in possessing the reality nor in hoping for it. Yet even these would not so

67. *The Happy Life* was the subject of a dialogue at Cassiciacum. The phrase comes from Cicero and is not directly biblical, but is close to the recurrent *Blessed is/are ...* of the scriptures, for example, Ps 1:1 and Mt 5:3-11.

68. See Ps 68:33(69:32); Is 55:3.

69. Cicero's *Hortensius* (fr. 36 M) began with this universal desire for happiness, and the idea recurs frequently in Augustine's writings.

strongly desire happiness⁷⁰ unless they possessed it in some degree, and there can be no doubt that they do desire it. In some mysterious way they must know it, therefore, and hence truly possess it through some kind of cognizance. What I am attempting to find out is whether this resides in the memory, because if it does, that must mean that we were happy once upon a time—though whether each of us was happy individually, or we were all happy in the man who committed the first sin, in whom we all died and from whom we are all born to misery,⁷¹ I am not now inquiring. I am simply posing the question: Does the life of happiness exist in the memory? We should not love it if we had no acquaintance with it. When we hear the word we all acknowledge that what we want is the reality behind the name, for the sound in itself holds no attraction for us. If a Greek hears it mentioned in Latin he does not find it delightful, because he does not understand what has been said; we, on the contrary, are delighted, just as he would be if he heard it in Greek, because the reality itself is neither Greek nor Latin. Greek-speakers, Latin-speakers and peoples of every other tongue are all athirst with longing to gain it. This proves that it is known to everyone, and if they could all be asked in some common tongue whether they wish to be happy, they would undoubtedly all reply that they do. This affirmation would not be possible if the reality spoken of were not held in their memories.

21. 30. Do they retain it in their memories in the same way as someone remembers Carthage after visiting it? No: the happy life is not seen with the eye, since it is not a corporeal object. Perhaps in the way we remember numbers, then? No, for a person who has knowledge of these does not still seek to gain it; but while we have knowledge of the happy life and therefore love for it, we still long to obtain it in order to be happy. Then in the way we remember eloquence, perhaps? No again. It is true that on hearing the word "eloquence" even people who are not yet eloquent remember the reality, and many of them desire to make it their own; this proves that some knowledge of eloquence is in them, but that is only because they have been exposed through the medium of their bodily senses to eloquence in others, and have appreciated it and desire to be similarly eloquent (though to be sure they would not appreciate it unless some knowledge of it were in them already, and they would not want it for themselves if they had no

70. See Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* V,28; *Hortensius* fr. 36 M.

71. See 1 Cor 15:22.

appreciation of it). But we do not experience the happy life in other people through any kind of bodily sense. Are we aware of it, then, in the way that we remember enjoyment? This may be the case, for even when sad I remember my earlier enjoyment, as I can remember leading a happy life even when I am miserable, yet I have never made contact with my enjoyment through any bodily sense: I have never seen, heard, smelled, tasted or touched it; in my mind alone I experienced being happy, and the knowledge of it stuck fast in my memory, so that I am able to remember it, sometimes with contempt and at other times with longing for the various things which I recall having enjoyed. I was formerly flooded with a kind of joy in depraved actions which I now recollect with loathing and disgust. Sometimes, though, it was good and honorable things that I enjoyed, and when I recall these I am stirred by desire for them, even if perhaps they are no longer present, and then it is in sadness that I recollect my earlier joy.

31. So where and when did I experience my life of happiness, so as to remember, love and desire it? This desire is not confined to me alone, nor to me and a few others; absolutely all of us want to be happy. Unless we had some sure knowledge of it, our wills would not be so firmly set on gaining it. But how can this be? If two men are asked whether they wish to undertake military service, it may happen that one of them will reply that he does, and the other that he does not, whereas if they are asked whether they wish to be happy, each of them will immediately say without hesitation that this is what he longs for; and in fact the choice of military service by the one and the refusal of it by the other are directed to no other end than happiness. Is this, perhaps, because one person finds enjoyment in one way and another differently? Thus all agree that they want to be happy, just as they would, if questioned, all agree that they want to enjoy life, and they think that a life of happiness consists of this enjoyment. One person pursues it in this way, another in that, but all are striving for the same goal, enjoyment. And since no one can claim never to have enjoyed anything, enjoyment is discovered in the memory and recognized there when the life of happiness is mentioned.

22. 32. Far be it, Lord, far be it from the heart of your servant who confesses to you, far be it from me to think that enjoyment of any and every kind could make me happy. A joy there is that is not granted to the godless,⁷² but to those only who worship you without looking for reward, because you yourself are their joy. This is the happy life, and this alone: to

72. See Is 48:22.

rejoice in you, about you and because of you. This is the life of happiness, and it is not to be found anywhere else. Whoever thinks there can be some other is chasing a joy that is not the true one; yet such a person's will has not turned away from all notion of joy.

23. 33. We cannot therefore assert without qualification that everyone wants to be happy, because people who are unwilling to find joy in you, in which alone the happy life consists, obviously do not want the happy life. Perhaps, though, all men and women do want it, but by reason of the struggle of flesh against spirit and spirit against flesh, which hinders them from doing what they want to do,⁷³ they fall back on what their strength permits, and make do with that? But is this because they do not want that other thing, for which strength is lacking, ardently enough to find the necessary strength? I think so, because when I ask everybody which they prefer, joy over the truth or joy over what is false,⁷⁴ they are as unhesitating in their reply that they prefer to rejoice over the truth as in their declaration that they want to be happy. Now the happy life is joy in the truth; and that means joy in you, who are the Truth,⁷⁵ O God who shed the light of salvation on my face,⁷⁶ my God.

Everyone wants this happy life, this life which alone deserves to be called happy; all want it, all want joy in the truth. I have met plenty of people who would gladly deceive others, but no one who wants to be deceived. Where else, then, did they come to know this happy life, except where they also came to know about truth? Since they do not wish to be deceived, they must love truth; and when they love the happy life, which is nothing else but joy in the truth, they are unquestionably loving truth also; but they could not be loving the truth unless there was some knowledge of it in their memories. Why, in that case, do they not rejoice over it? Why are they not happy? Because they are more immediately engrossed in other things which more surely make them miserable than that other reality, so faintly remembered, can make them happy. For a little while yet there is light for human beings; let them walk in it, yes, let them walk, lest the darkness close over them.⁷⁷

73. See Gal 5:17.

74. See 1 Cor 13:6.

75. See Jn 14:6.

76. See Pss 26(27):1; 41:12(42:11); 42(43):5.

77. See Jn 12:35.

34. Why, though, does "truth engender hatred,"⁷⁸ why does a servant of yours who preaches the truth make himself an enemy to his hearers,⁷⁹ if the life of happiness, which consists in rejoicing over the truth, is what they love? It must be because people love truth in such a way that those who love something else wish to regard what they love as truth and, since they would not want to be deceived, are unwilling to be convinced that they are wrong. They are thus led into hatred of truth for the sake of that very thing which they love under the guise of truth. They love truth when it enlightens them, but hate it when it accuses them.⁸⁰ In this attitude of reluctance to be deceived and intent to deceive others they love truth when it reveals itself but hate it when it reveals them. Truth will therefore take its revenge: when people refuse to be shown up by it, truth will show them up willy-nilly and yet elude them. Yes, this is our condition, this is the lot of the human soul, this is its case, as blind and feeble, disreputable and shabby, it attempts to hide, while at the same time not wishing anything to be hidden from it. It is paid back in a coin which is the opposite to what it desires, for while the soul cannot hide from truth, truth hides from the soul. Nonetheless, even while in this miserable state it would rather rejoice in truth than in a sham; and so it will be happy when it comes to rejoice without interruption or hindrance in the very truth, upon which depends whatever else is true.

In memory he knows God

24. 35. How widely I have ranged through my memory seeking you, Lord, and I have not found you outside it; for I have discovered nothing about you that I did not remember from the time I learned to know you. From that time when I learned about you I have never forgotten you, because wherever I have found truth I have found my God who is absolute Truth, and once I had learned that I did not forget it. That is why you have dwelt in my memory ever since I learned to know you, and it is there that I find you when I remember and delight in you. These are my holy delights, and they are your gift to me, for in your mercy you look graciously upon my poverty.

78. Terence, *Andria* 68: "Flattery wins friends, but truth engenders hatred."

79. See Jn 8:40; Gal 4:16.

80. See Jn 3:20; 5:35.

25. 36. But whereabouts in my memory do you dwell, Lord, in which part of it do you abide? What kind of couch have you fashioned for your repose, what manner of temple have you built yourself there? You have honored my memory by making it your dwelling-place, but I am wondering in what region of it you dwell. As I remembered you I left behind those parts of it which animals also possess, because I did not find you there amid the images of material things. I came to those regions of memory to which I had committed my emotional states, but I did not find you there either. Then I arrived at that place in my memory where my mind itself is enthroned, for indeed the mind must reside there, since it can remember itself; yet not even there were you to be found. Just as you are not any corporeal image, nor any of the emotions that belong to a living person, such as we experience when we are joyful or sad, when we desire or fear something, when we remember or forget or anything similar, so neither are you the mind itself: you are the Lord and God of the mind, and though all these things are subject to change you abide unchangeably⁸¹ above them all. And yet you have deigned to dwell in my memory from the first day that I learned to know you. What am I doing, inquiring which place in it is your place, as though there were really places there? Most certain it is that you do dwell in it, because I have been remembering you since I first learned to know you, and there I find you when I remember you.

26. 37. If that is so, where did I find you in order to make acquaintance with you at the outset? You could not have been in my memory before I learned to know you. Where then could I have found you in order to learn of you, if not in yourself, far above me? "Place" has here no meaning: further away from you or toward you we may travel, but place there is none. O Truth, you hold sovereign sway over all who turn to you for counsel, and to all of them you respond at the same time, however diverse their pleas. Clear is your response, but not all hear it clearly. They all appeal to you about what they want, but do not always hear what they want to hear. Your best servant is the one who is less intent on hearing from you what accords with his own will, and more on embracing with his will what he has heard from you.

81. See Ps 101:27(102:26).

27, 38. Late have I loved you, Beauty so ancient and so new,
late have I loved you!
Lo, you were within,
but I outside, seeking there for you,
and upon the shapely things you have made I rushed headlong,
I, misshapen.
You were with me, but I was not with you.
They held me back far from you,
those things which would have no being
were they not in you.
You called, shouted, broke through my deafness;
you flared, blazed, banished my blindness;
you lavished your fragrance, I gasped, and now I pant for you;
I tasted you, and I hunger and thirst;
you touched me, and I burned for your peace.⁸²

28, 39. When at last I cling to you⁸³ with my whole being there will be no more anguish or labor for me,⁸⁴ and my life will be alive indeed, because filled with you. But now it is very different. Anyone whom you fill you also uplift, but I am not full of you, and so I am a burden to myself. Joys over which I ought to weep do battle with sorrows that should be matter for joy, and I know not which will be victorious. But I also see griefs that are evil at war in me with joys that are good, and I know not which will win the day. This is agony, Lord, have pity on me! It is agony! See, I do not hide my wounds; you are the physician and I am sick; you are merciful, I in need of mercy. Is not human life on earth a time of testing?⁸⁵

Who would choose troubles and hardships? You command us to endure them, but not to love them. No one loves what he has to endure, even if he loves the endurance, for although he may rejoice in his power to endure, he would prefer to have nothing that demands endurance. In adverse circumstances I long for prosperity, and in times of prosperity I dread adversity.

82. The idea of a beauty which the soul recognizes as from an ancient knowledge is found in Plotinus' Tractate on Beauty (*Enneads* I,6,2). Augustine has enumerated the five senses several times before; it may be significant that this time the usual order is changed, with hearing being mentioned first. He has listened to the Word, and so his eyes are opened to beauty; contrast IV,13,20; for tasting the sweetness, see Ps 33:9(34:8); 1 Pt 2:3; for hungering and thirsting, Mt 5:6.

83. See Ps 62:9(63:8).

84. See Ps 89(90):10.

85. See Jb 7:1(Old Latin).

What middle ground is there between the two, where human life might be free from trial? Woe and woe again betide worldly prosperity, from fear of disaster and evanescent joy! But woe, woe, and woe again upon worldly adversity, from envy of better fortune, the hardship of adversity itself, and the fear that endurance may falter. Is not human life on earth a time of testing without respite?

"Give what you command"

29, 40. On your exceedingly great mercy rests all my hope. Give what you command, and then command whatever you will.⁸⁶ You order us to practice continence. A certain writer tells us, *I knew that no one can be continent except by God's gift, and that it is already a mark of wisdom to recognize whose gift this is.*⁸⁷ By continence the scattered elements of the self are collected and brought back into the unity from which we have slid away into dispersion; for anyone who loves something else along with you, but does not love it for your sake, loves you less. O Love, ever burning, never extinguished, O Charity, my God, set me on fire! You command continence: give what you command, and then command whatever you will.

Concupiscence of the flesh: sense of touch

30, 41. Quite certainly you command me to refrain from concupiscence of the flesh and concupiscence of the eyes and worldly pride.⁸⁸ You commanded me to abstain from fornication, and recommended a course even better than the marital union you have sanctioned;⁸⁹ and because you granted me the grace, this was the course I took even before I was ordained as a dispenser of your sacrament.

86. This famous phrase, repeated here and in subsequent chapters, was later to annoy Pelagius, as Augustine records in *The Gift of Perseverance* 20,53.

87. Wis 8:21.

88. See 1 Jn 2:16, and a comparable analysis in Cicero, *De Officiis* I,4,11-13. This threefold pattern of temptation structures the rest of Book X as Augustine discusses his present difficulties. The three vices, comprehensively understood, are the antithesis and parody of the virtues which make the triadically-created soul like the triune God.

89. See 1 Cor 7:38.

Yet in my memory, of which I have spoken at length, sexual images survive, because they were imprinted there by former habit. While I am awake they suggest themselves feebly enough, but in dreams with power to arouse me not only to pleasurable sensations but even to consent, to something closely akin to the act they represent. So strongly does the illusory image in my mind affect my body that these unreal figments influence me in sleep in a way that the reality could never do while I am awake. Surely this cannot mean that I am not myself while asleep, O Lord my God? Yet the moment of passing from wakefulness to sleep or back again certainly marks a great change in me. What becomes then of my reason, which enables me to resist these suggestions in waking hours, and remain unshaken if the actions themselves intrude upon my attention? Is reason shut down along with my eyelids? Is it lulled to sleep with the body's senses? Surely not, for how can it happen that often we do resist even in dreams, remembering our commitment and standing firm in complete chastity, giving no consent to these seductions? There is, notwithstanding, so wide a difference between the two states that even when the opposite occurs we return to peace of conscience on awakening, for the very difference between sleep and waking is obvious enough to convince us that we did not really do the disgraceful thing, even though we are sorry that it was in some sense done in us.

42. Is your hand not powerful enough⁹⁰ to heal all my soul's ills,⁹¹ all-powerful God, and by a still more generous grace to extinguish unruly stirrings even in my sleep? Yes, Lord, you will heap gift after gift upon me, that my soul may shake itself free from the sticky morass of concupiscence and follow me to you. As for those foul obscenities in my dreams, where bestial imagination drives the flesh to the point of polluting itself, grant that this soul of mine, through your grace rebellious against itself no more, may not even consent to, still less commit them. You are the Almighty, able to do more than we ask or understand,⁹² and it is no great task for you to make provision that nothing of this kind shall arouse the least sensual pleasure—not even such slight titillation as may be easily restrained—in a person of chaste intention while he is asleep, and this even in the prime of life.

90. See Nm 11:23.

91. See Ps 102(103):3.

92. See Eph 3:20.

But now that I have declared what I still am in this area of my sinfulness, speaking to my good Lord and exulting with trepidation⁹³ in what your gift has achieved in me, while deplored my unfinished state, my hope is that you will bring your merciful dealings in me to perfection, until I attain that utter peace which all that is within me and all my outward being will enjoy with you, when death shall be swallowed up in victory.⁹⁴

Taste

31, 43. During the day there is another trouble—and would that the day's troubles were limited to this!⁹⁵ By eating and drinking we repair the daily wear and tear on our bodies, until such time as you consign both food and belly to destruction.⁹⁶ Then you will put an end to our penury with wondrous abundance, and clothe this corruptible flesh in everlasting incorruptibility.⁹⁷ For the present, however, this necessity is pleasant to me, and I fight against the pleasure in order not to be captivated by it. By fasting I wage a daily warfare, and habitually force my body to obey me,⁹⁸ yet the painfulness of this is outweighed by pleasure, for hunger and thirst are pains of a sort, which like a fever burn and even kill unless we have recourse to the medicine of food; and since this is ready-to-hand through your comforting provision, whereby earth and water and sky are at the service of our weakness, what could be a calamity for us becomes instead an occasion of enjoyment.

44. You have taught me to take food at mealtimes as though it were medicine. But when I pass from uncomfortable need to tranquil satisfaction, the snare of concupiscence lies waiting for me in the very passage from one to the other; for this transition itself is pleasurable, yet there is no other route for us to take if we are to arrive where necessity forces us to go. Preservation of health is our justification for eating and drinking, but perilous partiality comes hot on its heels, and indeed often tries to run ahead, and so becomes the real motive for what I profess to do (and hope I

93. See Ps 2:11.

94. See 1 Cor 15:54.

95. See Mt 6:34.

96. See 1 Cor 6:13.

97. See 1 Cor 15:53.

98. See 1 Cor 9:26-27.

am doing) in the interests of health. The same standard does not apply to both, for what suffices to maintain health appears meager to appetite, and it is frequently hard to tell whether proper care for the body indicates that further support is needed, or deceitful, pleasure-seeking greed is demanding what will gratify it. At this uncertainty the wretched soul cheers up and marshals excuses in its own defense, glad to take advantage of the ambiguity about what temperate preservation of health requires, and cloaks its self-indulgence under the pretense that health is being prudently provided for.

Every day I strive to withstand these temptations. I call upon your right hand⁹⁹ and submit my perplexity to you, because as yet I do not know where I stand in this matter.

45. I hear the voice of my God commanding us, *Let not your hearts become gross with gluttony and drunkenness.*¹⁰⁰ In my case, drunkenness is far away, and by your mercy it will not come near me. Gluttony is a different matter: sometimes it creeps up on your servant, and only your mercy will drive it away. For no one can be continent except by your gift. When we pray you grant us many things; whatever good we had before we prayed was ours because we received it from you; and even the grace to recognize this afterward is received from you as gift. I have never been a drunkard myself, but I have known drunkards turned sober by you. It is your doing, then, that those who have never been drunkards are not so, and your doing again that those who have been should not be permanently addicted, and finally your doing that both sorts know whose work this is.

I have also heard you telling us: *Go not after your unruly desires, and hold back from indulgence.*¹⁰¹ Another admonition too I have heard from your Spirit, and this I greatly love: *If we eat we shall be none the better for it, and if we abstain, none the worse;*¹⁰² this means that the one choice will not make me rich, nor the other miserable. Again, there is another saying that I have heard: *Whatever circumstances I am in, I have learned to be content with them; I know how to have enough and to spare, and also how to endure privation. I am capable of anything in him who strengthens*

99. That is, Christ.

100. Lk 21:34.

101. Sir 18:30.

102. 1 Cor 8:8.

me.¹⁰³ And the man who made that claim was a soldier of the heavenly army, not mere dust as we are.

But dust we are, Lord,¹⁰⁴ and remember that from this dust you made us,¹⁰⁵ and that our race, once lost, was found again.¹⁰⁶ I love Paul for saying what he did in response to the breath of your Spirit, but not even he could have spoken so by his own powers, for he was made of the same dust; but, he declared, *I am capable of anything in him who strengthens me.* Strengthen me too, that I may be capable, give what you command, and then command whatever you will. Paul acknowledges that he has received everything from you, and his boasting is boasting only in the Lord.¹⁰⁷ I have heard another man making a similar request to mine: *Take gluttony away from me*, he prays.¹⁰⁸ These texts make it clear, O holy God, my God, that when what you command is done, it is by your gift.

46. You have taught me, my good Father, that *to the pure all things are pure,*¹⁰⁹ but that *it is bad for anyone to eat in a way that gives scandal.*¹¹⁰ You have taught that everything you have created is good, and *nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with thankfulness,*¹¹¹ that *food does not commend us to God,*¹¹² that *no one should take us to task in the matter of food or drink,*¹¹³ and that *a person who eats should not despise one who abstains, nor should a person who abstains pass judgment on another who eats.*¹¹⁴ All this I have learned, and I give thanks and praise to you, my God, my teacher, for knocking at the door of my ears¹¹⁵ and shedding your light into my heart. Pluck me free from all temptation. It is no uncleanness in food that I fear, but the uncleanness of greed. I know that Noah was given permission to eat any kind of flesh meat that was serviceable as food,¹¹⁶

103. Phil 4:11-13.

104. See Ps 102(103):14.

105. See Gn 3:19.

106. See Lk 15:24,32.

107. See 1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 10:17.

108. Sir 23:6.

109. Ti 1:15.

110. Rom 14:20.

111. 1 Tm 4:4.

112. 1 Cor 8:8.

113. Col 2:16.

114. Rom 14:3.

115. See Rv 3:20.

116. See Gn 9:2-3.

that Elijah was sustained with meat,¹¹⁷ and that John, for all his marvelous grace of abstinence, was not defiled by animal food when he made use of locusts.¹¹⁸ On the contrary, I am aware that Esau was led astray by craving for lentils,¹¹⁹ that David condemned himself for his intemperate thirst for water¹²⁰ and that our King himself was tempted not by meat but by bread.¹²¹ So too your people deserved rebuke in the desert not because they wanted meat, but because their hunger for food led them to murmur against the Lord.¹²²

47. Beset by these temptations I struggle every day against gluttony, for eating and drinking are not something I can decide to cut away once and for all, and never touch again, as I have been able to do with sexual indulgence. The reins that control the throat must therefore be relaxed or tightened judiciously; and is there anyone, Lord, who is not sometimes dragged a little beyond the bounds of what is needful? If there is such a person, he is a great man, so let him tell out the greatness of your name.¹²³ I am not he, for I am a sinful man,¹²⁴ yet I will tell out the greatness of your name nonetheless; and may he who has overcome the world¹²⁵ intercede for my sins,¹²⁶ and count me among the frailer members of his body,¹²⁷ because your eyes rest upon my imperfections and in your book everyone will find a place.¹²⁸

Smell

32, 48. I am not much troubled by sensuality in regard to pleasant smells: if they are absent I do not seek them, if present, I do not reject them, and I am prepared to do without them at all times. Or so it seems to me, though I may perhaps be deceived; for whatever discernment there is in me is shrouded by dismal darkness and hidden from my sight, so that when

117. See 1 Kgs 17:6.

118. See Mt 3:4.

119. See Gn 25:34.

120. See 2 Sm 23:15-17.

121. See Mt 4:3.

122. See Nm 11:1-20.

123. See Ps 68:31(69:30); Rv 15:4; Lk 1:46.

124. See Lk 5:8.

125. See Jn 16:33.

126. See Rom 8:34.

127. See Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 12:22.

128. See Ps 138(139):16.

my mind questions itself about its powers it can scarcely trust any reply it receives. What lies within is generally obscured unless brought to the light by experience. In this life, which is said to be one long temptation,¹²⁹ no one should be complacent, for we cannot tell whether someone who has perhaps made progress from a bad state to a better may not also degenerate from that better state to something worse. There is but one hope, one reliance, one solid promise, and that is your mercy.¹³⁰

Hearing

33, 49. In earlier days the pleasures of the ear enthralled me more persistently and held me under their spell, but you broke my bonds and set me free. Nowadays I do admittedly find some peaceful contentment in sounds to which your words impart life and meaning, provided the words are sung sensitively by a tuneful voice; but the pleasure is not such as to hold me fast, for when I wish I can get up and go. These melodies, however, demand a place of some dignity in my heart, along with the ideas that are their life and in whose company they gain admittance, and I do not find it easy to determine what place is suitable for them. At times it seems to me that I am paying them more honor than is their due, because I am aware that our minds are more deeply moved to devotion by those holy words when they are sung, and more ardently inflamed to piety, than would be the case without singing. I realize that all the varied emotions of the human spirit respond in ways proper to themselves to a singing voice and a song, which arouse them by appealing to some secret affinity. Yet sensuous gratification, to which I must not yield my mind for fear it grow languid, often deceives me: not content to follow meekly in the wake of reason, in whose company it has gained entrance, sensuous enjoyment often essays to run ahead and take the lead. And so in this respect I sin inadvertently, and only realize it later.

50. On occasion, however, I stray into excessive rigor in my exaggerated caution against such a mistake. While this mood lasts I would dearly like all those sweet and tuneful strains which accompany David's psalter

129. See Jb 7:1.

130. This is the fundamental conviction underlying all of Augustine's analysis of temptation, and the entire rationale of *confessio* for him: the self not only discovers itself but essentially constitutes itself in relation to God.

to be banished from my ears, and indeed from the ears of the Church. It seems safer to me that we should follow the example of Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, of which I have been frequently reminded: he permitted the reader of the psalm so slight an inflection of the voice that he seemed to be proclaiming it rather than singing. All the same, I remember the tears I shed at the Church's song in the early days of my newly-recovered faith,¹³¹ and how even today I am moved not by the singing as such but by the substance of what is sung, when it is rendered in a clear voice and in the most appropriate melodies, and then I recognize once more the value of this custom.

Thus I vacillate between the danger of sensuality and the undeniable benefits. Without pretending to give a definitive opinion I am more inclined to approve the custom of singing in church, to the end that through the pleasures of the ear a weaker mind may rise up to loving devotion. Nonetheless when in my own case it happens that the singing has a more powerful effect on me than the sense of what is sung, I confess my sin and my need of repentance, and then I would rather not hear any singer. Such is my condition: weep with me, and weep for me, you who feel within yourselves that goodness from which kind actions spring! Any of you who do not have these feelings will not be moved by my experience. But do you hear me, O Lord my God: look upon me and see,¹³² have mercy and heal me,¹³³ for in your eyes I have become an enigma to myself, and herein lies my sickness.

Sight

34. 51. If we are to conclude the account of these temptations of the flesh¹³⁴ that still beat upon me as I groan and long to have my heavenly tent put on over this earthly one,¹³⁵ I must confess in the tender, brotherly hearing of your temple¹³⁶ my weakness with regard to one more sense that remains to be discussed: over-indulgence of the eyes. Beautiful things and varied shapes appeal to them, vivid and well-matched colors attract; but

131. Especially in the week that followed his baptism; see IX,6,14.

132. See Ps 79:15(80:14).

133. See Pss 6:3(2); 12:4(13:3); 24(25):16-17; 102(103):3; Mt 4:23.

134. See 1 Jn 2:16.

135. See 2 Cor 5:2.

136. That is, his hearers among the faithful; see 1 Cor 3:16-17; 2 Cor 6:16.

let not these captivate my soul. Rather let God ravish it; he made these things exceedingly good,¹³⁷ to be sure, but he is my good, not they. Every day, all through the hours that I am awake, colors and shapes impinge upon me, and never is any respite from them allowed me, as it is from the sound of song, or sometimes from all sounds, when silence reigns. Light is the queen of colors and bathes everything we see, and wherever I am in the daytime it flows all around me, and caresses me even while I am doing something else and not thinking about it. So insistently does it make its way in that if it is suddenly withdrawn we long to get it back, and if we are deprived of it for any length of time we feel depressed.

52. O Light, Tobit saw you when despite the blindness of his carnal eyes he pointed out the path of life to his son, and strode unerringly ahead, borne by the feet of charity.¹³⁸ Isaac saw you, though his bodily eyes were dimmed and closed by age, when true insight was granted him in blessing his sons, notwithstanding his inability to tell one from the other as he uttered his blessing.¹³⁹ Jacob saw you when, likewise blinded by advanced age, he beheld by the radiant vision of his heart the tribes of the people that was to be, prefigured in his sons; and when, stretching out crossed hands in a gesture full of mystery, he laid them on his grandsons, Joseph's children, not in the way indicated by their father, who saw only the externals, but as he himself judged to be right by the vision that guided him within.¹⁴⁰ All these enjoyed the same Light, the Light that is one in itself and unites all who see and love it.

The case is different with earthly light, of which I was speaking. This imparts to the life of this world a seductive zest, dangerous to those whose love for it is blind. Yet once they have learned to praise you for light as well as for your other gifts, "Creator God, O Lord of all,"¹⁴¹ they take it up in a hymn to your glory, instead of being sapped by it in somnolence of spirit,¹⁴² and this is how I would wish to act. I resist alluring sights lest my feet, those feet with which I walk in your way, become entangled, and to you I lift the invisible eyes of my spirit that you may pluck my feet from

137. See Gn 1:31.

138. See Tb 4:2-20.

139. See Gn 27:1-40.

140. See Gn 48:3; 49:28.

141. From Ambrose's evening hymn; see IX,12,32.

142. As were the Manichees by their light doctrine.

the snare.¹⁴³ I know that you will pluck them free again and again, for enmeshed they often are. I am repeatedly caught in the traps scattered on every side, but you will never fail to free me, for you neither grow drowsy nor fall asleep, who guard Israel.¹⁴⁴

53. How many things craftsmen have made, things without number, employing their manifold skills and ingenuity on apparel, footwear, pottery and artifacts of every conceivable kind, on pictures too, and various images; and how far they have in these matters exceeded what is reasonably necessary or useful, or serves some pious purpose! All of them increase the temptations to which our eyes are subject. People pursue outside themselves what they are making, but forsake the One within by whom they were made, and so destroy what they were made to be by driving it out of doors.

O my God, for me you are loveliness itself; yet for all these things too I sing a hymn and offer a sacrifice of praise¹⁴⁵ to you who sanctify me, because the beautiful designs that are born in our minds and find expression through clever hands derive from that Beauty which transcends all minds, the Beauty to which my own mind aspires day and night. Those who create beauty in material things, and those who seek it, draw from that source their power to appreciate beauty, but not the norm for its use. The norm is there, and could they but see it they would need to search no further. They could save their strength for you¹⁴⁶ rather than dissipate it on enervating luxuries.

As for me, I say all these things and recognize their truth, yet still I snag my steps on these beautiful objects; but you pluck me free, Lord, you pluck me free because my eyes are fixed on your mercy.¹⁴⁷ I am miserably caught, but you mercifully extricate me, sometimes without my being aware of it, when I am only lightly entangled, but sometimes painfully because I am already stuck fast.

143. See Ps 24(25):15.

144. See Ps 120(121):4.

145. See Ps 115(116):17.

146. See Ps 58:10(59:9).

147. See Ps 25(26):3.

Concupiscence of the eyes

35. 54. There is still another temptation, one more fraught with danger. In addition to the concupiscence of the flesh, which lures us to indulge in the pleasures of all the senses, and brings disaster on its slaves who flee far from you,¹⁴⁸ there is also concupiscence of the mind, a frivolous, avid curiosity. Though it works through these same senses it is a craving not for gratification of the flesh but for experience through the flesh. It masquerades as a zeal for knowledge and learning. Since it is rooted in a thirst for firsthand information about everything, and since the eyes are paramount among the senses in acquiring information, this inquisitive tendency is called in holy scripture *concupiscence of the eyes*.¹⁴⁹ Sight is, properly speaking, the eyes' business, but we use the word also of our other senses in their cognitive function. Thus we do not say, "Listen for anything red," or "Smell how shiny!" or "Taste how brilliant this is!" or "Feel the brightness of that!" For all such objects we speak of seeing. Yet we do say not only, "See how it shines," which the eyes alone can report; we also say, "Let's see how this sounds ... See how fragrant ... See what this tastes like ... Just look how hard that is!" So, as I have pointed out, general sense-experience is called lust of the eyes, because when the other senses explore an object in an effort to collect knowledge, they claim for themselves, by a certain analogy, the office of seeing, in which the eyes unquestionably hold the primacy.

55. From this consideration the distinction more clearly emerges between two kinds of activity on the part of the senses: pleasure-seeking and curiosity; for sensuality pursues the beautiful, the melodious, the fragrant, the tasty and the silky, whereas curiosity seeks the opposite to all these, not because it wants to undergo discomfort but from lust to experience and find out. What sensual pleasure is to be had in viewing a mangled corpse which sickens you? Yet if there is one lying anywhere, people congregate in order to experience ashen-faced horror. At the same time they are frightened that it may give them nightmares! Anyone would think they had been forced to look at the thing while awake, or had been persuaded to do so by some rumor of its beauty. The same holds for the other senses, but it would be tedious to pursue the point through them all.

148. See Ps 72(73):27.

149. 1 Jn 2:16, the second temptation.

To satisfy this morbid craving monstrous sights are exhibited at shows. From the same motive efforts are made to scrutinize the secrets of the natural world that lie beyond our sight; knowledge of these is of no profit, yet people want to know them simply for the sake of knowing. The same motive prompts some to seek perverted knowledge through magical practices. In religion itself people tempt God from the same motive, demanding signs and wonders¹⁵⁰ not for any salutary purpose but simply because they crave experience.

56. In this vast thicket full of snares and perils there are many temptations that I have by now lopped off and cleared out of my heart, as you have enabled me, O God of my salvation;¹⁵¹ yet when dare I claim, with so many of these things besetting our daily life with their din—when dare I claim that by no such sight am I ever drawn to gaze, ever trapped into frivolous fascination? Theatrical shows, admittedly, have no hold on me now, nor do I care to trace the movements of the stars, nor has my mind ever sought answers through necromancy; I hate all unhallowed rites. But with what contrivances does the enemy work to persuade me to ask some sign of you, O Lord my God, to whom I owe humble and single-hearted service! I beg you through our King and through Jerusalem, our single-hearted, chaste homeland, that as consent to such suggestions is far from me, so may it be far always, and farther still. When I entreat you for the salvation of someone, the object of my prayer is quite different.¹⁵² You grant me, and will continue to grant me, the grace to follow you freely, whatever you choose to do.

57. Be that as it may, the many minute, contemptible things that solicit our curiosity every day are past counting, as are our frequent falls. How often do we begin by putting up with gossips in order not to upset the vulnerable, and then gradually come to listen avidly? When a hound in pursuit of a hare is part of a show at the circus I will not watch, but when it happens in the country and I chance to be passing, the chase may distract me from some deep thought and attract me to itself. It is not the swerving of my horse's body that alters my course, but the inclination of my own heart; and unless you promptly show me my weakness and command me to use the spectacle as a means of lifting my mind to you by some suitable

150. See Lk 11:16; Jn 4:48.

151. See Pss 17:47(18:46); 37:23(38:22).

152. That is, his intercession has nothing to do with magical or astronomical practices employed by superstitious "healers."

reflection, or else to disregard the whole thing and pass on, I stand foolishly gaping. Even when I am sitting at home, why does a lizard catching flies, or a spider binding them when they blunder into its web, often have me gazing intently? Does the fact that these animals are so small make any difference to the situation? True, I pass from watching them to praising you, wonderful creator and dispenser of all that is, but it is not in that frame of mind that I begin to watch. To get up without delay is one thing, not to fall in the first place is another.

My life is full of such weaknesses, and my sole hope is your exceedingly great mercy. When our heart becomes a bin for things like this, stuffed with a load of idle rubbish, our prayers are often interrupted and disturbed by it, and though the pleading of our heart is addressed to your ears, worthless thoughts intrude from who knows where to cut short the great business on which we are engaged in your presence.

The third great temptation: pride

36. 58. Are we to regard this as a trivial fault? Can there be for us any route back to hope other than your mercy, of which we have proof already because you have begun to change us? You know how much you have changed me, for you began by healing me of the itch to justify myself, so that you could be compassionate to all my other iniquities as well, heal all my ailments, rescue my life from decay, crown me in pity and mercy and overwhelmingly satisfy my desire with good things.¹⁵³ You crushed my pride by inspiring in me reverential fear, and you made my neck submissive to your yoke. And now I wear it, and find it benign, as you have promised and as you have made it.¹⁵⁴ Indeed it was so before, when I was afraid to take it on me, but I did not know it then.

59. Is it possible, Lord—this I ask of you who alone hold sway without trace of pride, because you alone are the true Lord¹⁵⁵ who owe fealty to no other—is it possible that the third category of temptation¹⁵⁶ has left me in peace, or ever can leave me in peace throughout my life in this world? This is the temptation to want veneration and affection from others, and to want

153. See Ps 102(103):3.

154. See Mt 11:30.

155. See Is 37:20.

156. See 1 Jn 2:16: he has now reached "the pride of life."

them not for the sake of some quality that merits them, but in order to make such admiration itself the cause of my joy. It is no true joy at all, but leads only to a miserable life and shameful ostentation. This tendency is one of the chief impediments to loving you and revering you with chaste fear,¹⁵⁷ and therefore you thwart the proud but give your grace to the humble;¹⁵⁸ you thunder at this world's ambitions till the foundations of the mountains shudder.¹⁵⁹

The enemy of our true happiness therefore lies in wait for those of us who by reason of our official positions in human society must of necessity be loved and honored by our fellows.¹⁶⁰ On every side he scatters popular plaudits to trap us, so that as we eagerly collect them we may be caught unawares, and abandon our delight in your truth to look for it instead in human flattery. So the affection and honor we receive come to be something we enjoy not for your sake but in your stead, and in this way that enemy who decided to set up his throne in the far recesses of the north¹⁶¹ wins cronies in his own likeness, not to live with him in loving concord but to be tormented in his company, slaves in darkness and cold of him who imitates you in his perverse, distorted fashion.¹⁶²

But as for us, Lord, remember that we are your little flock:¹⁶³ keep us as your own.¹⁶⁴ Spread your wings and let us flee to shelter beneath them. Be yourself our glory: let us be loved on your account, and let it be your word in us that is honored. Whoever touts for human praise that you reprehend will find no human champion when you judge, nor be reprieved when you condemn. It may not be the case that a sinner is praised for his cherished plans, or a wrongdoer commended;¹⁶⁵ even so, if a person is lauded for some gift that you have given him, and he derives more joy from being praised than for possessing the gift which earns the praise, he too is accepting praise which in your sight is a sham. Even the one who extols

157. See Ps 18:10(19:9).

158. See Jas 4:6; 1 Pt 5:5.

159. See Ps 17:14.8(18:13.7).

160. Here Augustine's own anxieties are apparent as he contemplates the role of bishop he must assume, particularly the large opportunities that preaching affords him.

161. See Is 14:13-15.

162. The derisory poem in Is 14 refers immediately to a king of Babylon, but was applied in Christian tradition to the devil. The north, as the region of cold and darkness most distant from the sun, came to symbolize the devil's realm; so Dante found the depths of hell cold.

163. See Lk 12:32.

164. See Is 26:13.

165. See Ps 9:24(10:3).

him is better off than the one so esteemed, for the former at least appreciates God's gift in a human being, whereas the other prizes what humans give him more than the gift of God.

37. 60. We are put to the test by these temptations every day, Lord, unceasingly are we tempted; and the crucible in which we are assayed is the human tongue.¹⁶⁶ In this respect too you lay upon us the injunction to continence: so give what you command, and then command whatever you will. You know how my heart groans to you¹⁶⁷ over this, and how my eyes stream with tears; for there is a dangerous infection here, and how far I am clear of it is not easy for me to discern. I am sorely afraid about my hidden sins,¹⁶⁸ which are plain to your eyes¹⁶⁹ but not to mine. In other areas of temptation I have some shrewdness in self-examination, but in this matter almost none. Where sensual desires or idle curiosity are concerned I can measure my progress in self-restraint by going without these pleasures either voluntarily or because opportunity for indulgence is lacking. In that situation I question myself as to whether I am more troubled by their absence, or less. The same applies to riches. People seek wealth in order to use it in the furtherance of one of the three concupiscences, or two of them, or all three; and anyone who lacks the insight to be certain whether he can despise wealth while still possessing it can test himself by getting rid of it. But what of praise? Are we to lead evil lives in order to be rid of it and so test our ability? Should we live in such an abandoned and brutal fashion that everyone who knows us will hate us? Can one imagine a crazier idea than this? If a good life characterized by noble works inevitably and rightly entails being commended, neither the good life nor the resultant commendation can be renounced. Yet only when something pleasant has been withdrawn can I be sure of my ability to live without it, either contentedly or perhaps with reluctance.

61. What then am I to confess to you, Lord, with regard to this kind of temptation? What indeed, except that I do enjoy being praised? But I take more delight in truth itself than in any eulogy; for if I were asked which I would prefer: to be a thief and crooked in every respect yet praised for it by other people, or to be steadfast and absolutely firm in the truth, but reviled by all, I know which I would choose. All the same I must admit that,

166. See Prv 27:21.

167. See Ps 37:9(38:8).

168. See Ps 18:13(19:12).

169. See Sir 15:20.

though I would not wish the satisfaction I take in anything good about myself to be enhanced by someone else's approbation, yet it is enhanced; and, what is more, criticism diminishes it.

And when this wretchedness on my part troubles me, an excuse sidles into my mind, the validity of which only you know, O God, for it leaves me perplexed. You have enjoined upon us not only continence, which means restraining our love from certain objects, but also justice, which requires us to bestow it on certain others; and you have willed that our charity should be directed not to you alone but also to our neighbor. Now, the idea often occurs to me that when I take pleasure in being spoken highly of by someone of good understanding, what I am pleased about is the progress, or the promise, shown by my neighbor, while on the contrary I am saddened by my neighbor's misfortune when I hear him finding fault with something good, or something he does not understand. In fact I am saddened at times by the adulation I receive when qualities of mine which I do not myself much like are eulogized, or even when good points which are of only slight importance are rated more highly than they deserve. I am reluctant, then, to have a person who speaks highly of me holding a different opinion from my own on the subject of myself; but how am I to know whether this reaction springs from concern for the other person's welfare? Might it not just as well be due to the fact that I get increased satisfaction from good features I like in my own character when they find favor with another person too? After all, it is no compliment to me if my opinion of myself does not commend itself to others, since this implies either that qualities displeasing to me are being applauded, or that features which I find less attractive are being accorded higher honor. Am I not justified, then, in saying that in this matter I do not know where I stand?

62. You are Truth, and in you I see that if I am touched by the high opinion others hold of me, it should be not for my own sake but so that my neighbor may profit thereby. And whether this is the case, I do not know. In this respect I know myself less clearly than I know you. I beg you to reveal myself to me as well, O my God, so that I may confess the wounded condition I diagnose in myself to my brethren, who will pray for me.

Let me try again, and question myself more carefully. If I am anxious that my neighbor shall profit by praising me, why am I less concerned when some other person is unjustly criticized than when I am myself? Why does an affront offered to myself bite more deeply than one flung at another person in my hearing, given that the injustice of it is the same in either case?

Do I really not know the answer? Is there nothing left to say, but that I am deluding myself¹⁷⁰ and not acting truthfully¹⁷¹ with heart and tongue in your sight? Remove this madness far from me, Lord, lest my own mouth supply me with the sinner's oil to ooze over my head.¹⁷²

38, 63. Needy and poor am I,¹⁷³ but I am the better for recognizing it and lamenting it in secret, and seeking your mercy until my shortcomings are made good and my imperfect self brought to perfection in a peace which the gaze of the arrogant will never descry. But words proceed from the mouth, and actions are observed by other people, and this is fraught with peril, because a hankering for praise will garner every little tribute of approval it can beg, to bolster some fancied pre-eminence of its own. This is a real temptation to me, and even when I am accusing myself of it, the very fact that I am accusing myself tempts me to further self-esteem. We can make our very contempt for vainglory a ground for preening ourselves more vainly still, which proves that what we are congratulating ourselves on is certainly not contempt for vainglory; for no one who indulges in it can be despising it.¹⁷⁴

39, 64. Within our own hearts too, yes, deep within, is another wicked temptation of the same class. Some there are who are complacent about themselves although they are not liked by others, or even actively disliked; and such people may make no attempt to be likeable. But self-satisfied though they are, they are very displeasing to you, not only because they make a virtue out of what is not good, but also because they arrogate your good gifts to themselves, or perhaps acknowledge them as yours but claim them as their due, or again recognize them as the gifts of your grace, but hug the grace to themselves, grudging it to others and refusing to share the joy.

You see the fear in my heart, hemmed in as I am by all these dangers and struggles, and many another like them. It is not that I have ceased to inflict these wounds on myself; rather I am conscious that ever and anew you are healing them.

170. See Gal 6:3.

171. See Jn 3:21; 1 Jn 1:6.

172. See Ps 140(141):5.

173. See Ps 108(109):22.

174. In other words, it is possible to be proud even of humility. There is no escape except the mercy and truth of God.

Summary of all his discoveries

40. 65. O Truth,¹⁷⁵ is there any road where you have not walked with me, teaching me what to avoid and what to aim at, whenever I referred to you the paltry insights I had managed to attain, and sought your guidance? I surveyed the external world as best I could with the aid of my senses,¹⁷⁶ and studied the life my body derives from my spirit, and my senses themselves. Then I moved inward to the storehouse of my memory, to those vast, complex places amazingly filled with riches beyond counting; I contemplated them and was adread.¹⁷⁷ No single one of them could I have perceived without you, but I found that no single one of them was you. But what of myself, the discoverer, I who scanned them all and tried to distinguish them and evaluate each in accordance with its proper dignity? Some things I questioned as my senses reported them, others I felt to be inextricably part of myself; I classified and counted the very messengers, and in the ample stores of memory I scrutinized some items, pushed some into the background and dragged others into the light: what, then of me? No, I was not you, either, not even I as I did all this: the faculty, that is, by which I achieved it, not even that faculty in me was you; for you are that abiding Light¹⁷⁸ whom I consulted throughout my search. I questioned you about each thing, asking whether it existed, what it was, how highly it should be regarded; and all the while I listened to you teaching me and laying your commands upon me.

It is still my constant delight to reflect like this; in such meditation I take refuge from the demands of necessary business, insofar as I can free myself. Nowhere amid all these things which I survey under your guidance do I find a safe haven for my soul except in you; only there are the scattered elements of my being collected, so that no part of me may escape from you.

From time to time you lead me into an inward experience quite unlike any other, a sweetness beyond understanding. If ever it is brought to fullness in me my life will not be what it is now, though what it will be I cannot tell. But I am dragged down again by my weight of woe, sucked back into

175. See Jn 14:6. Christ, the Truth, the Mediator implicitly present throughout this book, here becomes explicitly needed.

176. Here Augustine begins a recapitulation of the mystical ascent at Ostia (IX,10,24-25) and that described at X,6,8.

177. See Hab 3:2.

178. See Jn 1:9; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46; 1 Jn 1:5.

everyday things and held fast in them;¹⁷⁹ grievously I lament, but just as grievously am I held. How high a price we pay for the burden of habit! I am fitted for life here where I do not want to be, I want to live there but am unfit for it, and on both counts I am miserable.

41. 66. So now under the three headings of temptation I have taken stock of the sickly state to which my sins have reduced me, and I have called upon your right hand for saving help.¹⁸⁰ I have seen your blazing splendor, but with a wounded heart; I was beaten back, and I asked, "Can anyone reach that?" I was flung far out of your sight.¹⁸¹ You are the Truth,¹⁸² sovereign over all. I did not want to lose you, but in my greed I thought to possess falsehood along with you, just as no one wants to tell lies in such a way that he loses his own sense of what is true. That was why I lost you, for you did not consent to be possessed in consort with a lie.

The Mediator, priest and victim

42. 67. Whom could I find to reconcile me to you? Should I go courting the angels? With what prayer or by what rites could I win them to my cause? Many have there been who tried to make their way back to you and, finding themselves insufficient by their own powers, had recourse to such means as these, only to lapse into a fancy for visions that tickled their curiosity.¹⁸³ They were deservedly deluded for they sought you in arrogance, thrusting out their chests in their haughty knowledge instead of beating them in penitence; and so they attracted to themselves the spiritual powers of the air¹⁸⁴ as their true kin, fit accomplices and allies of their pride. These spirits used magical powers to beguile their clients, who were seeking a mediator to purge them of their impurities, but found none; for there was no one there but the devil, disguised as an angel of light.¹⁸⁵ Being without a fleshly body himself, he strongly appealed to the pride of fleshly humans. They were mortal and sinful, whereas you, Lord, to whom they sought, though proudly, to be reconciled, are immortal and

179. See XIII,9,10 for "weight," and Plotinus, *Enneads* IV,8,1.

180. See Pss 59:7(60:5); 102(103):3; 107:7(108:6); Mt 4:23.

181. See Ps 30:23(31:22).

182. See Jn 14:6.

183. Apparently Neo-Platonists of a superstitious bent who practiced theurgy; he links the vice of *curiositas* to them.

184. See Eph 2:2.

185. See 2 Cor 11:14.

without sin. What we needed was a mediator to stand between God and men¹⁸⁶ who should be in one respect like God, in another kin to human beings, for if he were manlike in both regards he would be far from God, but if Godlike in both, far from us; and then he would be no mediator. By the same token that spurious mediator, by whose means pride was deservedly duped in keeping with your secret decree, does have one thing in common with human beings, namely sin; and he appears to have something else in common with God because, not being clad in mortal flesh, he is able to flaunt himself as immortal. But in fact since death is the wage sin earns¹⁸⁷ he has this in common with humans, that he lies under sentence of death as surely as they do.

43. 68. In your unfathomable mercy you first gave the humble certain pointers to the true Mediator, and then sent him, that by his example they might learn even a humility like his.¹⁸⁸ This Mediator between God and humankind, the man Christ Jesus,¹⁸⁹ appeared to stand between mortal sinners and the God who is immortal and just: like us he was mortal, but like God he was just. Now the wage due to justice is life and peace; and so through the justice whereby he was one with God he broke the power of death¹⁹⁰ on behalf of malefactors rendered just,¹⁹¹ using that very death to which he willed to be liable along with them. He was pointed out to holy people under the old dispensation that they might be saved through faith in his future passion,¹⁹² as we are through faith in that passion now accomplished. Only in virtue of his humanity is he the Mediator; in his nature as the Word he does not stand between us and God, for he is God's equal,¹⁹³ God with God,¹⁹⁴ and with him one only God.

69. How you loved us, O good Father, who spared not even your only Son, but gave him up for us evildoers!¹⁹⁵ How you loved us, for whose sake he who deemed it no robbery to be your equal was made subservient, even to the point of dying on the cross!¹⁹⁶ Alone of all he was free among the dead,¹⁹⁷ for he had

186. See 1 Tm 2:5.

187. See Rom 6:23.

188. Contrast the deficiencies he observed in the "books of the Platonists," VII,20,26. This paragraph echoes the scriptural texts that struck him then; see VII,9,13.

189. See 1 Tm 2:5.

190. See 2 Tm 1:10.

191. See Rom 4:5.

192. See Rom 4:5; 1 Tm 2:4.

193. See Phil 2:6.

194. See Jn 1:1.

195. See Rom 8:32.

196. See Phil 2:6,8.

197. See Ps 87:6(88:5).

power to lay down his life and power to retrieve it.¹⁹⁸ For our sake he stood to you as both victor and victim, and victor because victim;¹⁹⁹ for us he stood to you as priest and sacrifice, and priest because sacrifice,²⁰⁰ making us sons and daughters to you instead of servants²⁰¹ by being born of you to serve us. With good reason is there solid hope for me in him, because you will heal all my infirmities²⁰² through him who sits at your right hand and intercedes for us.²⁰³ Were it not so, I would despair. Many and grave are those infirmities, many and grave; but wider-reaching is your healing power. We might have despaired, thinking your Word remote from any conjunction with humankind, had he not become flesh and made his dwelling among us.²⁰⁴

70. Filled with terror by my sins and my load of misery I had been turning over in my mind a plan to flee into solitude, but you forbade me, and strengthened me by your words. *To this end Christ died for all*, you reminded me, *that they who are alive may live not for themselves, but for him who died for them.*²⁰⁵ See, then, Lord: I cast my care upon you²⁰⁶ that I may live, and I will contemplate the wonders you have revealed.²⁰⁷ You know how stupid and weak I am:²⁰⁸ teach me and heal me.²⁰⁹ Your only Son, in whom are hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge,²¹⁰ has redeemed me with his blood. Let not the proud disparage me,²¹¹ for I am mindful of my ransom. I eat it, I drink it,²¹² I dispense it to others, and as a poor man I long to be filled²¹³ with it among those who are fed and feasted. And then do those who seek him praise the Lord.²¹⁴

198. See Jn 10:18.

199. See Heb 9:28.

200. See Heb 7:27.

201. See Gal 4:7.

202. See Ps 102(103):3.

203. See Rom 8:34.

204. See Jn 1:14.

205. 2 Cor 5:15.

206. See Ps 54:23(55:22).

207. See Ps 118(119):17-18.

208. See Ps 68:6(69:5).

209. See Pss 24(25):5; 6:3(2).

210. See Col 2:3.

211. See Ps 118(119):22.

212. See Jn 6:55,57; 1 Cor 10:31; 11:29.

213. See Lk 16:21.

214. See Ps 21:27(22:26). The allusion is eucharistic.

Book XI

Time and Eternity

1. 1. Eternity belongs to you, O Lord, so surely you can neither be ignorant of what I am telling you, nor view what happens in time as though you were conditioned by time yourself?

Why then am I relating all this to you at such length? Certainly not in order to inform you. I do it to arouse my own loving devotion toward you, and that of my readers, so that together we may declare, *Great is the Lord, and exceedingly worthy of praise.*¹ I have said already,² and will say again, that it is out of love for loving you that I do this, even as we pray for things though Truth tells us that *Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*³ We confess to you our miseries and the mercies you have shown us in your will to set us free completely, as you have begun to do already; and by so confessing to you we lay bare our loving devotion. Our hope is that we may cease to be miserable in ourselves and may find our beatitude in you; for you have called us to be poor in spirit, to be meek, to mourn, to hunger and thirst for righteousness, to be merciful and pure-hearted, and to be peacemakers.⁴

See, then, how long a tale I have told you, as best I could and as I truly wanted to, because you first willed that I should confess to you, my Lord and God, for you are good and your mercy endures for ever.⁵

Augustine prays for understanding of the scriptures

2. 2. My pen serves me as a tongue,⁶ but when will it find eloquence enough to recount all those exhortations and threats, all that encouragement and guidance, by which you led me to this position where I must preach the

1. Pss 47:2(48:1); 95(96):4; 144(145):3.

2. That is, at II, 1, 1.

3. Mt 6:8.

4. See Mt 5:3-9.

5. See Ps 117(118):1-4.

6. See Ps 44:2(45:1).

word and administer the sacrament to your people? Furthermore, even had I skill to relate it all in order, the dripping moments of time are too precious to me.⁷ I have long burned with desire to meditate on your law,⁸ that there I might confess to you both what I know and what I still find baffling, your dawning light in me and the residual darkness that will linger until my weakness is swallowed up by your strength. I am chary of frittering away on anything else the hours I find free from such needful activities as bodily refreshment, mental concentration, the duties I owe to the people and others I do not owe but render nonetheless.⁹

3. O Lord my God, hear my prayer,¹⁰
 may your mercy hearken to my longing,¹¹
 a longing on fire not for myself alone
 but to serve the brethren I dearly love;
 you see my heart and know this is true.
 Let me offer in sacrifice to you the service of my heart and tongue,
 but grant me first what I can offer you;
 for I am needy and poor,¹²
 but you are rich unto all who call upon you,¹³
 and you care for us though no care troubles you.
 Circumcise all that is within me from presumption
 and my lips without from falsehood.¹⁴
 Let your scriptures be my chaste delight,
 let me not be deceived in them
 nor through them deceive others.
 Hearken, O Lord, have mercy, my Lord and God,¹⁵
 O Light of the blind, Strength of the weak—who yet are Light to those
 who see and Strength to the strong—
 hearken to my soul,

7. A water-clock, clepsydra, measured time by the dripping away of a known quantity of water.

8. See Ps 1:2.

9. In addition to preaching and performance of the liturgy a bishop had heavy judicial responsibilities.

10. See Ps 60:2(61:1).

11. See Ps 9B:38 (10:17).

12. See Ps 85(86):1.

13. See Rom 10:12.

14. See Ex 6:12.

15. See Jer 18:19; Ps 26(27):7.

hear me as I cry from the depths,¹⁶
for unless your ears be present in our deepest places
where shall we go¹⁷ and whither cry?
Yours is the day, yours the night,¹⁸
a sign from you sends minutes speeding by;
spare in their fleeting course a space for us
to ponder the hidden wonders of your law:
shut it not against us as we knock.¹⁹

Not in vain have you willed so many pages to be written,
pages deep in shadow, obscure in their secrets;
not in vain do harts and hinds seek shelter in those woods,
to hide and venture forth,
roam and browse, lie down and ruminate.
Perfect me too, Lord, and reveal those woods to me.²⁰

Lo, your voice is joy to me,
your voice that rings out above a flood of joys.
Give me what I love;
for I love indeed, and this love you have given me.
Forsake not your gifts, disdain not your parched grass.
Let me confess to you all I have found in your books,
Let me hear the voice of praise,²¹
and drink from you,
and contemplate the wonders of your law²²
from the beginning when you made heaven and earth
to that everlasting reign when we shall be with you in your holy city.²³

4. Have mercy on me, Lord, and hearken to my longing;²⁴ for I do not think it arises from this earth, or concerns itself with gold or silver or precious stones, with splendid raiment or honors or positions of power, with the pleasures of the flesh or with things we need for the body and for this our

16. See Ps 129(130):1.

17. See Ps 138(139):7-8.

18. See Ps 73(74):16.

19. See Mt 7:7-8; Lk 11:9-10.

20. See Ps 28(29):9; in Old Latin: *Vox Domini perficiens cervos et revelabit silvas.*

21. See Ps 25(26):7.

22. See Ps 118(119):18.

23. That is, from Gn 1:1 to Rev 22:21. He does not attempt here to comment on the whole Bible, but in this book and the two following he moves from creation to the Sabbath rest at the end of it, which prefigures eternity.

24. See Pss 26(27):7; 9B:38(10:17).

life of pilgrimage; for all these things are provided for those who seek your kingdom and your righteousness.²⁵ Look and see, O my God, whence springs my desire. The unrighteous have told me titillating tales, but they have nothing to do with your law, O Lord;²⁶ and see, that law is what stirs my longing. See, Father, have regard to me and see and bless my longing, and let it be pleasing in your merciful eyes²⁷ that I find grace before you,²⁸ so that the inner meaning of your words may be opened to me as I knock at their door.²⁹ I beg this grace through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, the man at your right hand,³⁰ the Son of Man whom you have made strong to stand between yourself and us as mediator.³¹ Through him you sought us when we were not seeking you,³² but you sought us that we might begin to seek you. He is the Word through whom you made all things,³³ and me among them, your only Son through whom you called your believing people to be your sons by adoption,³⁴ and me among them; through him, then, do I make my plea to you, through him who sits at your right hand to intercede for us,³⁵ for in him are hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge.³⁶ And they are what I seek in your books. Moses wrote of him; Christ told us so himself,³⁷ and he is the Truth.

In the Beginning God made heaven and earth

3. 5. Let me listen, so that I may understand how you made heaven and earth in the beginning. Moses wrote that statement; he wrote it and went away, and made his passover, his passing from you to you;³⁸ and so he is not here face to face with me now. If he were, I would take hold of him and ask him and in your name implore him to open these mysteries to me. I would bend my bodily ears to the sounds that broke from his mouth,

25. See Mt 6:33.

26. See Ps 118(119):85.

27. See Ps 18:15(19:14).

28. See Dn 3:40.

29. See Mt 7:7-8; Lk 11:9-10.

30. See Ps 79:18(80:17).

31. See 1 Tm 2:5.

32. See Rom 10:20.

33. See Jn 1:1-3.

34. See Gal 4:5.

35. See Rom 8:34.

36. See Col 2:3.

37. See Jn 5:46.

38. See IV, 9, 14, where the sinner passes from "God in his tranquillity to God in his anger"; here, by contrast, is the saint's passover.

though if he spoke Hebrew those sounds would knock in vain at the door of my perception, for nothing of what was said would reach my mind, whereas if he spoke Latin I would know what he was saying. But how would I know whether he spoke the truth? If I were to ascertain that too, could it be on his assertion? No; undoubtedly within myself, in that inner habitation of my thought, the truth that is neither Hebrew nor Greek nor Latin nor any vernacular would speak to me without bodily organ of mouth or tongue, and without any clatter of syllables would tell me, "He is speaking the truth"; and then with instant certainty I would say to that man who served you, "What you say is true."

But since I cannot question him, who spoke truthfully because you, O Truth, had filled him, I beg you yourself, O Truth, my God, to pardon my sins,³⁹ and as you granted that servant of yours the grace to say those things, grant also to me the grace to understand them.

4. 6. Heaven and earth plainly exist, and by the very fact that they undergo change and variation they cry out that they were made.⁴⁰ If anything was not made, yet exists, there is no element in it that was not present earlier; for change and variation imply that something is made that was not previously there. Heaven and earth further proclaim that they did not make themselves: "We are, because we have been made; we did not exist before we came to be, as though to bring ourselves into being." And their visible existence is the voice with which they say this. It was you who made them, Lord: you are beautiful, so it must have been you, because they are beautiful; you who are good must have made them, because they are good; you who are, because they are. Yet not in the same way as you, their creator, are they beautiful and good, nor do they exist as you exist; compared with you they have neither beauty nor goodness nor being. We know this, and we thank you for the knowledge, yet compared with your knowledge ours is but ignorance.

God creates in his Word

5. 7. But how did you make heaven and earth? What tool did you employ for so vast an enterprise? You cannot have gone to work like a human

39. See I,5: divine mercy is needed for both right speaking and right listening.

40. This is the same starting-point that Augustine took in the ascent to God at Ostia (IX,10,25) and that is recorded at X,6,9, but this time he begins from scripture.

craftsman, who forms a material object from some material in accordance with his imaginative decision. Whatever design his mind's eye conjures up within, the mind has power to impose upon the material, but where would he get this power, if you had not made his mind? He merely stamps a form on matter already in existence and in possession of its being, such as clay or stone or wood or gold or any other stuff of the kind. And whence would these derive their existence, unless you had established them in being? You made the craftsman's body; you made the mind which exercises control over his limbs; you made the material he needs to fashion anything; you made the skill that equips him to master his art and visualize within his mind the plan to which he will give outward expression. You made the perceptive senses which can interpret the design in the mind and transfer it to the material to produce the thing he is making, and then report back to the mind on what has been made, so that the craftsman may test it against the truth that rules him within himself, to ensure that it is made properly. All these things praise you, the creator of them all.

But you, how do you make them? How did you make heaven and earth, O God? You certainly did not use either heaven or earth as your workshop when you made heaven and earth, nor did you work in the air or in the waters, because these too belong to heaven and earth; nor can you have made the whole universe anywhere within the whole universe, because there was no place in it where such work could be done before it was made and given its being. Nor did you hold in your hand some material from which to fashion heaven and earth, for where would you have obtained any material you had not made, in order to use it for making something else? Is there anything that exists at all, if not because of you?

Clearly, then, you spoke and things were made. By your word you made them.⁴¹

6. 8. But how did you speak? Surely not in the same way as you did when a voice came from the cloud, saying, *This is my beloved Son!*⁴² That utterance came and went; it had a beginning and an end. Its syllables made themselves heard and then faded away, the second following the first, the third following the second, and so on in due order until the last one followed the others, and silence fell after the last. From this it is self-evident that your voice made itself heard through the movement of a

41. See Ps 32(33):9,6.

42. Mt 3:17; see Mt 17:5; Lk 9:35.

created thing,⁴³ which was the temporal instrument of your eternal will. Then these words of yours, in their temporal expression, would be reported by the outward ear to the mind of any discerning listener whose inner ear was attuned to your eternal Word. The mind would then compare the words sounding in time with your silent Word in eternity, and say, "These are something different, totally different. They are far below me and have no being, since they are fleeting and ephemeral; but the Word of my God is above me and abides for ever."⁴⁴ It seems, then, that if you made use of audible, evanescent words to say that heaven and earth should come to be, and that was how you made heaven and earth, there must have been some material thing in existence before you made heaven and earth, so that such a voice might use the creature's temporal movements to make itself audible in time. But no material thing did exist before heaven and earth; or, if there was such a thing, you undoubtedly must have made it without using transitory speech, since you meant to use it as the vehicle of that transitory utterance in which you would say that heaven and earth should come to be. Whatever that thing was from which such an utterance might be produced, it could not have existed at all unless you had made it. So what word did you speak to bring into being that material object, from which those other words were to proceed?

This Word is eternal

7. 9. You are evidently inviting us to understand that the word in question is that Word who is God, God with you who are God;⁴⁵ he is uttered eternally, and through him are eternally uttered all things. This does not mean that one thing was said, and then, when that was finished, another thing, so that everything could be mentioned in succession; no, all things are uttered simultaneously in one eternal speaking. Were this not so, time and change would come into it, and there would be neither true eternity nor true immortality. I know this, my God, and I give you thanks for it. I know, and I confess to you, Lord,⁴⁶ and everyone who is grateful for assured truth knows it with me, and blesses you. We know this, Lord, we

43. That is, probably, the air.

44. See Is 40:8.

45. See Jn 1:1.

46. See Mt 11:25-27; Lk 10:21-22.

know it, because insofar as a thing is no longer what it once was, or is now what it once was not, that thing is dying or rising to new life; but in your Word there is no cessation or succession, for all is truly immortal and eternal. Thus in that Word who is coeternal with yourself you speak all that you speak simultaneously and eternally, and whatever you say shall be comes into being.⁴⁷ Your creative act is in no way different from your speaking. Yet things which you create by speaking do not all come to be simultaneously, nor are they eternal.

The eternal Word is the Beginning

8. 10. Why is this, I ask, O Lord my God? I do understand to some degree, but I do not know how to articulate it, except like this: Everything which begins to exist and then ceases to exist does so at the due time for its beginning and cessation decreed in that eternal Reason where nothing begins or comes to an end. This eternal Reason is your Word, who is the Beginning in that he also speaks to us.⁴⁸ The gospel records that he claimed this by word of mouth, making his claim audible to people's outward ears that they might believe him and seek him within themselves and find him in the eternal Truth where he, our sole teacher,⁴⁹ instructs apt disciples. There it is that I hear your voice, O Lord, the voice of one who speaks to me, because anyone who truly teaches us speaks to us directly, whereas one who is no true teacher does not speak to us, though speak he may. After all, can anyone teach us, other than stable Truth? When some changeable creature advises us, we are but led to that stable Truth, where we truly learn as we stand still and listen to him, and are filled with joy on hearing the Bridegroom's voice,⁵⁰ and surrender ourselves once more to him from whom we came. He is the Beginning for us in the sense that if he were not abidingly the same, we should have nowhere to return to after

47. This eternity of the creative Word is the essential background to Augustine's long exploration of the mystery of time, which occupies most of the present book. He will show that time is not a primordial medium into which God's acts are inserted, nor a first principle alongside the Word; time is itself the product of the creative Word.

48. See Jn 8:25, a notoriously difficult text in the Greek. The present paragraph plays on the links between *the beginning* of Gn 1:1, Jn 1:1 and Jn 8:25, all being identified with Christ according to an interpretation already found in Ambrose, *Hexameron* I,4,15.

49. See Mt 23:8.

50. See Jn 3:29.

going astray.⁵¹ When we turn back from our errant ways it is by acknowledging the truth that we turn back, and he it is who teaches us to acknowledge it, because he is the Beginning who speaks to us.

9, 11. In this Beginning you made heaven and earth, O God. You made them in your Word, your Son, your Power, your Wisdom,⁵² your Truth, wonderfully speaking and in a wondrous way creating. Who can understand this? Who explain it? What is this light that shines through the chinks of my mind and pierces my heart, doing it no injury? I begin to shudder yet catch fire with longing: I shudder inasmuch as I am unlike him, yet I am afire with longing for him because some likeness there is.⁵³ Wisdom it is, none other than Wisdom, that shines through my darkness, tearing apart the cloud that envelops me; yet I fall away from it and am plunged into obscurity once more, lost in the murk and rubble that are my punishment, for so wasted away is my strength to the point of destitution⁵⁴ that I cannot even support the good that I have, until you, O Lord, who are mercifully disposed toward all my sins, heal all my ailments too. And I know you will, for you will rescue my life from decay, crown me in pity and mercy, and overwhelmingly satisfy my desire with good things; and my youth will be renewed like an eagle's.⁵⁵ We are already saved, but in hope, and in patience we look forward to the fulfillment of your promises.⁵⁶

Let everyone who has the aptitude listen to your spoken word within; for my part I will begin with confidence from your word in scripture, and cry out, *How magnificent are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you have created all things.*⁵⁷ This wisdom is no other than the Beginning, and in that Beginning you have made heaven and earth.

51. In IV,16,31 Augustine reflected that because the soul's true home is eternity, we are in no danger of finding it fallen into ruin when we return after an absence.

52. See 1 Cor 1:24.

53. Compare the "region of unlikeness," VII,10,16.

54. See Ps 30:11(31:10).

55. See Ps 102(103):3-5. According to a belief going back at least to Aristotle, the hooked upper section of an aging eagle's beak grew out so far beyond the lower half that the bird became unable to open its mouth. In imminent danger of death from starvation, the eagle hammered its beak against a rock to rid itself of the surplus, and then could eat again. Augustine expounds the idea in his *Exposition of Psalm* 102,9, seeing the rock as a symbol of Christ.

56. See Rom 8:24-25.

57. Ps 103(104):24.

"What was God doing before that?" Meaningless question

10, 12. People who ask us, "What was God doing before he made heaven and earth?" are obviously full of their stale old nature.⁵⁸ "If he was at leisure," they say, "and not making anything, why did he not continue so thereafter and for ever, just as he had always done nothing prior to that? If some change took place in God, and some new volition emerged to inaugurate created being, a thing he had never done before, then an act of will was arising in him which had not previously been present, and in that case how would he truly be eternal? God's will is not a created thing; it exists prior to the act of creation, because nothing would be created unless the creator first willed it. Now, God's will belongs to the very substance of God. But if some element appears in God's substance that was previously not there, that substance cannot accurately be called eternal. On the other hand, if God's will that creation should occur is eternal, why is creation not eternal as well?"

11, 13. People who take that line do not yet understand you, O Wisdom of God and Light of our minds. They do not yet understand how things which receive their being through you and in you come into existence; they strive to be wise about eternal realities, but their heart flutters about between the changes of past and future found in created things, and an empty heart it remains.⁵⁹ Who is to take hold of it and peg it down, that it may stand still for a little while and capture, if only briefly, the splendor of that eternity which stands for ever, and compare it with the fugitive moments that never stand still, and find it incomparable, and come to see that a long time is not long except in virtue of a great number of passing moments which cannot all run their course at once? They would see that in eternity nothing passes, for the whole is present, whereas time cannot be present all at once. Can they not see that whatever is past has been pushed out of the way by what was future, and all the future follows on the heels of

58. Sign of the "old man": see Rom 6:6; Eph 4:22; Col 3:9. The Manichees certainly asked this question in a polemical spirit; other Gnostic groups apparently also did. Philosophers had long grappled with the mysteries of eternity and time: Plotinus, *Enneads* III,7, explored it at length and influenced Augustine; behind Plotinus stood Plato's *Timaeus* 37D-38D and Aristotle's *Physics* IV,10-14. But Augustine's polemic here against Manichean questions is to be read within the whole context of his meditation on the mystery of the creative Word. To imagine God subject to time, as we are, and eternity as no more than an endless succession of "times," is to make us a little less unlike God (see XI,9,11). Augustine is tackling the difficulty inherent in the Christian affirmation of an absolute beginning.

59. See Ps 5:10(9).

the past, and the whole of both past and future flows forth from him who is always present, and is by him created? Who shall take hold of the human heart, to make it stand still and see how eternity, which stands firm, has neither future nor past, but ordains future and past times? Has my hand the strength for this, or my mouth the persuasiveness to achieve such a thing?

12, 14. However, I will set about replying to the questioner who asks, "What was God doing before he made heaven and earth?" But I will not respond with that joke someone is said to have made: "He was getting hell ready for people who inquisitively peer into deep matters"; for this is to evade the force of the question. It is one thing to see the solution, and something different to make fun of the problem. So I will not give that reply. I would rather have answered, "What I do not know, I do not know," than have cracked a joke that exposed a serious questioner to ridicule and won applause for giving an untrue answer. Instead I will state that you, our God, are the creator of every created thing; and, if we take "heaven and earth" to cover all that is created, I boldly make this assertion: Before God made heaven and earth, he was not doing anything; for if he was doing or making something, what else was he doing but creating? And no creature was made before any creature was made. I wish I could know everything that I desire to know to my own profit with the same certainty with which I know that.

13, 15. If any giddy-minded person wanders off into fantasy about epochs of time before creation, and finds it amazing that you, God almighty, who are the creator of all things, you who are the architect of heaven and earth and hold everything in your hand, should through measureless ages have been at rest before undertaking this huge task, such a person should wake up and realize that his amazement is misplaced. How could measureless ages have passed by if you had not made them, since you are the author and creator of the ages?⁶⁰ Or what epochs of time could have existed, that had not been created by you? And how could they have passed by, if they had never existed? If there was a "time" before you made heaven and earth, how can it be said that you were not at work then, you who are the initiator of all times? For of course you would have made that time too; there could not have been any passing times before you created times. If, therefore, there was no time before heaven and earth

60. See Heb 1:2.

came to be, how can anyone ask what you were doing then? There was no such thing as "then" when there was no time.

16. Nor can it be said that you are "earlier in time" than all eras of time, for that would mean that there was some kind of time already in existence before you. You have precedence over the past by the loftiness of your ever-present eternity, and you live beyond all the future, because future times are future, but as soon as they have arrived they will be past, whereas you are ever the same, and your years fail not.⁶¹ Your years do not come and go. Our years pass and new ones arrive only so that all may come in turn, but your years stand all at once, because they are stable: there is no pushing out of vanishing years by those that are coming on, because with you none are transient. In our case, our years will be complete only when there are none left. Your years are a single day,⁶² and this day of yours is not a daily recurrence, but a simple "Today," because your Today does not give way to tomorrow, nor follow yesterday. Your Today is eternity, and therefore your Son, to whom you said, *Today have I begotten you*,⁶³ is coeternal with you. You have made all eras of time and you are before all time, and there was never a "time" when time did not exist.

Time, a creature of God—what is it?

14, 17. There was therefore never any time when you had not made anything, because you made time itself. And no phases of time are coeternal with you, for you abide, and if they likewise were to abide, they would not be time. For what is time? Who could find any quick or easy answer to that? Who could even grasp it in his thought clearly enough to put the matter into words? Yet is there anything to which we refer in conversation with more familiarity, any matter of more common experience, than time? And we know perfectly well what we mean when we speak of it, and understand just as well when we hear someone else refer to it. What, then, is time? If no one asks me, I know; if I want to explain it to someone who asks me, I do not know. I can state with confidence, however, that this much I do know: if nothing passed away there would be

61. See Ps 101:28(102:27); Heb 1:12.

62. See Ps 89:4(90:3); 2 Pt 3:8.

63. Ps 2:7; Acts 13:33; Heb 1:5; 5:5.

no past time; if there was nothing still on its way there would be no future time; and if nothing existed, there would be no present time.

Now, what about those two times, past and future: in what sense do they have real being, if the past no longer exists and the future does not exist yet? As for present time, if that were always present and never slipped away into the past, it would not be time at all; it would be eternity. If, therefore, the present's only claim to be called "time" is that it is slipping away into the past, how can we assert that this thing *is*, when its only title to being is that it will soon cease to be? In other words, we cannot really say that time exists, except because it tends to non-being.⁶⁴

15. 18. Nonetheless we speak of a long time or a short time, and we do so only of time past or time in the future. For example, we call a hundred years ago a long time in the past, and likewise a hundred years hence a long time in the future; but we call—say—ten days ago a short time past, and ten days hence a short time in the future. But on what grounds can something that does not exist be called long or short? The past no longer exists and the future does not exist yet. We ought not, therefore, to say, "That is a long time," but, when speaking of the past, we should say, "That was long," and of the future, "That will be long."

O my Lord, my Light,⁶⁵ will your truth not deride us humans for speaking so? This long time in the past: was it long when it was already past, or earlier than that, when it was still present? If the latter, yes, then it might have been long, because there was something to be long; but if it was already past it no longer existed, and therefore could not have been long, since it was not in existence at all. We ought not, therefore, to say, "That era in the past was a long one," for we shall not find anything that was long, for since that point at which it became past time it has no longer had any being. Rather, we ought to say, "That era of time was long while it was present," because while it was present it was long. It had not yet passed away and so passed out of existence, and so there was something there which could be long. But when it passed away it ceased to be long at that very point when it ceased to be at all.

64. This is the heart of the matter for Augustine. He pursues the argument relentlessly throughout the rest of this book, revealing time as something elusive that slips the more swiftly through our fingers the more we try to analyze it or justify our habit of measuring it. The inexorable rush of time toward non-being reveals the fragility of time-bound, time-conditioned creatures, whose only refuge from their native nothingness is the eternity of God.

65. See Mi 7:8; Ps 26(27):1.

19. Now, human mind, let us consider whether present time can be long, as you seem to think it can, since you have been granted the power to be aware of duration and to measure it. Answer my questions, then. Is the present century a long period of time? Before you say yes, reflect whether a hundred years can be present. If the first of them is running its course, that year is present, but ninety-nine others are future and therefore as yet have no being. If the second year is running its course, one year is already past, another is present, and the remainder are still to come. In the same fashion we may represent any one of the intervening years of the century as present, and always the years that preceded it will be past, and those that follow it future. Evidently, then, a hundred years cannot be present.

Well then, consider whether the one current year at least can be present. If we are in the first month of it, the other months are in the future; if we are in the second, the first month is already past and the rest do not yet exist. Even the current year, then, is not present in its totality, and if it is not present in its totality, the year is not present; for a year consists of twelve months, and while any one of them is current that one is present, but the others are either past or future.

But we must go further, and notice that the current month is not in fact present, because only one day of it is: if we are on the first day, the rest are future; if on the last, the others are past; if on any day in the middle, we shall be midway between past and future days.

20. Look where this leaves us. We saw earlier that present time was the only one of the three that might properly be called long, and now this present time has been pared down to the span of a bare day. But let us take the discussion further, because not even a single day is present all at once. It is made up of night hours and day hours, twenty-four in all. From the standpoint of the first hour all the rest are still future; the last hour looks to all those already past; and any one we pick in between has some before it, others to follow. Even a single hour runs its course through fleeing minutes: whatever portion of it has flown is now past, and what remains is future. If we can conceive of a moment in time which cannot be further divided into even the tiniest of minute particles, that alone can be rightly termed the present; yet even this flies by from the future into the past with such haste that it seems to last no time at all. Even if it has some duration, that too is divisible into past and future; hence the present is reduced to vanishing-point.

What kind of time, then, can be referred to as "a long time"? Future time, perhaps? Then we must not say, "That is a long time," because there is as yet nothing to be long; we will have to say, "That will be long." But when will it be so? If at the point of speaking that period is still in the future, it will not be long, because nothing yet exists to be long; if, however, at the moment when we speak it has begun to exist by emerging from the non-existent future, and so has become present, so that there is something in existence to be long, then this present time proclaims itself incapable of being long for the reasons already discussed.

16. 21. All the same, Lord, we are conscious of intervals of time, and we compare them with each other and pronounce some longer, others shorter. We also calculate by how much this period of time is longer or shorter than that other, and we report that the one is twice or three times as long as the other, or that it is the same length. But when we measure periods of time by our awareness of them, what we measure is passing time. Could anyone measure past periods that no longer exist, or future periods that do not yet exist? Only someone who is bold enough to claim that what has no being can be measured. So then, while time is passing it can be felt and measured, but once past it cannot, because it no longer exists.

17. 22. I am asking questions, Father, not making assertions: rule me, O my God, and shepherd me.⁶⁶ For who would make so bold as to tell me that there are not really three tenses or times—past, present and future—as we learned as children and as we in our turn have taught our children, but that there is only present, since the other two do not exist? Or is the truth perhaps that they do exist, but that when a future thing becomes present it emerges from some hiding-place, and then retreats into another hiding-place when it moves from the present into the past? Where, otherwise, did soothsayers see future events, if they do not yet exist? What has no being cannot be seen. Nor would people who tell stories about the past be telling true tales if they had no vision of those past events in their minds; and if the events in question were non-existent they could not be seen. The future and the past must exist, then?

66. See Pss 22(23):1; 27(28):9.

18. 23. Allow me, Lord, to press the question further: O my hope,⁶⁷ do not let me lose the thread. If future and past things do exist, I want to know where they are. If this is not yet within my compass, I do know at any rate that, wherever they are, they are not there as future or past, but as present. For if in that place too future things are future, they are not there yet; and if there too past things are past, they are there no longer. Clearly, then, wherever they are and whatever they are, they can only be present. Nonetheless, when a true account is given of past events, what is brought forth from the memory is not the events themselves, which have passed away, but words formed from images of those events which, as they happened and went on their way, left some kind of traces in the mind through the medium of the senses. This is the case with my childhood, which no longer exists: it belongs to past time which exists no longer, but when I recall it and tell the story I contemplate the image of it which is still in my memory.⁶⁸

Whether something similar occurs in the prediction of future events, in that the seer has a presentiment of images which exist already, I confess, O my God, that I do not know. But this I undoubtedly do know, that we often plan our future actions beforehand, and that the plans in our mind are present to us, though the action we are planning has as yet no being, because it is future. When we set about it, and begin to do what we were planning, then the action will have real being, because then it will be not future but present.

24. However the mysterious presentiment of future events may be explained, only what exists can be seen. But what already exists is not future but present. Therefore when it is claimed that future events are seen, it is not that these things are seen in themselves, because they have as yet no existence, being still future. It may be, however, that their causes, or signs of them, are seen, because these already exist; hence they are not future but present to the people who discern them, and from them future events may take shape in the mind and can be foretold. These ideas in the mind also exist already, and can be inwardly contemplated by people who predict the future.

67. See Ps 70(71):5.

68. This tying of speculation about time to the phenomenon of memory is one of Augustine's particularly original contributions.

Let me take an example from a wealth of such occurrences. I watch the dawn, and I give advance notice that the sun is about to rise. What I am looking at is present; what I foretell is future. Not that the sun is future, of course—no, that exists already, but its rising is future; it has not yet happened, yet unless I could imagine the sunrise in my mind, as I do now while I speak of it, I would be unable to forecast it. The dawn, which I am watching in the sky, is not the sunrise, but only precedes it; and similarly the picture I have in my mind is not the sunrise either. But these two realities are present and open to observation, so that the future event can be announced before its time.

We must conclude, then, that future events have no being as yet, and if they have no being yet they do not exist, and if they do not exist it is absolutely impossible for anyone to see them. But they can be predicted on the basis of other things which are already present and hence can be seen.

19. 25. You are the king of your creation; tell me, then: how do you instruct people's minds about the future? You did so teach the prophets. What method can you adopt for teaching what is future, when to you nothing is future at all? Would it be better to say that you teach what is present but has a bearing on the future? Yes, because what does not exist obviously cannot be taught. This method of yours is far above the reach of my mind; it is too much for me⁶⁹ and of myself I cannot see it, but I will see it with your help, when you grant me this gift, O gracious light of my secret eyes.⁷⁰

20. 26. What is now clear and unmistakable is that neither things past nor things future have any existence, and that it is inaccurate to say, "There are three tenses or times: past, present and future," though it might properly be said, "There are three tenses or times: the present of past things, the present of present things, and the present of future things." These are three realities in the mind, but nowhere else as far as I can see, for the present of past things is memory, the present of present things is attention, and the present of future things is expectation.⁷¹ If we are allowed to put it that way, I do see three tenses or times, and admit that they

69. See Ps 138(139):6.

70. See Eccl 11:7; Ps 37:11(38:10).

71. This triad, which recurs in XII,15,18, is important for Augustine's thought. Some commentators see it as a pattern for *The Confessions* as a whole: Books I-IX = *memoria*, Book X = *contitutus*, Books XI-XIII = *expectatio*. It has links also with the triad *esse ... nosse ... velle* in XIII,11,12, where the soul's likeness to the Trinity is considered.

are three. Very well, then, let the phrase pass, "There are three tenses or times: past, present and future," as common usage improperly has it: let people go on saying this. I do not mind, nor will I put up any opposition or offer correction, provided we understand what we are saying, and do not assert that either the future or the past exists now. There are few things, in fact, which we state accurately; far more we express loosely, but what we mean is understood.

21. 27. I said just now⁷² that we measure periods of time as they pass, so as to declare this interval twice as long as that, or this equal to that, and report anything else about segments of time that our measurements have revealed. It follows, then, that we measure these intervals of time as they are passing by, as I remarked, and if anyone asks me, "How do you know that?" I must be allowed to reply, "I know it because we do in fact measure them; but what does not exist we cannot measure, and past and future do not exist." But how can we measure present time, when it has no extension?⁷³ We can only hope to measure it as it passes by, because once it has passed by there will be no measuring; it will not exist to be measured.

But when it is measured, where does it come from, by what path does it pass, and whither go? Where from, if not from the future? By what path, if not the present? Whither, if not into the past? It comes, then, from what is not yet real, travels through what occupies no space, and is bound for what is no longer real. But what are we trying to measure, if not time that does have some extension? We speak of "half as long," "double the time," "three times as long," "equal in length," and make similar statements about time only in reference to extended time, or duration. Where then is this duration which will give us a chance to measure passing time? In the future, whence it has come to pass us by? But we do not measure what does not yet exist. In the present, perhaps, through which it passes on its way? But where there is no extension we cannot measure. In the past, then, to which it has gone? But we cannot measure what no longer exists.

22. 28. My mind is on fire to solve this most intricate enigma. O Lord, my God, my good Father, through Christ I beg you not to shut against me the door to these truths, so familiar yet so mysterious. Do not slam the door in the face of my desire, nor forbid me entrance to that place where I may watch these things grow luminous as your mercy sheds its light upon

72. That is, in XI,16,21.

73. That is, the ideal present is a point, which has position but no magnitude.

them, Lord. To whom should I put my questions about them? And to whom should I confess my stupidity with greater profit than to you, who do not weary of my intense, burning interest in your scriptures? Give me what I love; for I love indeed, and this love you have given me. Give this to me, Father, for you truly know how to give good gifts to your children,⁷⁴ give me this gift, for I have only just begun to understand, and the labor is too much for me⁷⁵ until you open the door.⁷⁶ Through Christ I implore you, in the name of that holy of holies,⁷⁷ let no noisy person stand in my way. I too have believed, and so I too speak.⁷⁸ This is my hope, for this I live: to contemplate the delight of the Lord.⁷⁹ See how old you have made my days;⁸⁰ they are slipping away and I know not how.

We speak of one time and another time, of this period of time or that; we ask, "How long did that man speak?" or "How long did he take to do it?" We say, "What a long time it is since I saw so-and-so," and "This syllable has twice the length of that short one." We say these things and listen to them, we are understood and we understand. They are perfectly plain and fully familiar, yet at the same time deeply mysterious, and we still need to discover their meaning.

Movements of the heavenly bodies are not time itself, but only markers of it.

23, 29. I was once told by a certain learned man that the movements of the sun, moon and stars themselves constitute time. I did not agree with him. Why, in that case, should not the movements of all corporeal things constitute time? Suppose the luminaries of heaven were to halt, but a potter's wheel went on turning, would there not still be time by which we

74. See Mt 7:11.

75. See Ps 72(73):16 (Old Latin).

76. See Mt 7:7-8; Lk 11:9-10.

77. *In nomine eius sancti sanctorum:* obscure. In view of the context (desire to enter) and particularly of Ps 72(73):17 (*until I enter the Lord's sanctuary and understand*), which immediately follows the verse just alluded to, it seems that Augustine is thinking of an entrance effected by Christ for all his followers, as described in Heb 9:1-15; 10:11-19. But the plural (*sancta sanctorum*) is more common in references to this. Others therefore take *sancti* in apposition to *eius*, that is, Christ, and translate, "in his name who is the holy of holies" or "the holiest of all holy ones."

78. See Ps 115(116):10.

79. See Ps 26(27):4.

80. See Ps 38:6(39:5) (Old Latin).

could measure those rotations, and say either that all of them took the same time, or (if the speed of the wheel varied) that some were of longer duration, others shorter? And when we said this, would we too not be speaking within time; and in the words we used, would there not be some long syllables and some short; and why could that be said of them, unless because some of them had taken a longer time to pronounce than others?

Through this small thing, O God, grant our human minds insight into the principles common to small things and great. The stars and the other luminaries in the sky are there to mark our times and days and years. Yes, granted; but as I would not assert that the revolution of that little wooden wheel itself constituted a day, so my learned informant on the other hand had no business to say that its gyrations did not occupy a space of time.

30. I want to know the essence and nature of time, whereby we measure the movement of bodies and say, for instance, that one movement lasts twice as long as another. Now I have a question to ask. Taking the word "day" to apply not only to the period of sunlight on earth—day as opposed to night, that is—but to the sun's whole course from the east and back to the east again, in the sense that we say, "So many days elapsed," meaning to include the nights, and not reckoning the nights as extra time over and above the days; taking it, then, that the movement of the sun in its circular course from the east back to the east completes a day, this is my question: Is it the movement itself that constitutes a day? Or the time it takes? Or both? If the movement constitutes a day, then it would still be one day if the sun were to achieve its circuit in an interval of time equivalent to a single hour. If it is the time it takes, there would not be a day if the space between one sunrise and the next were as short as an hour; the sun would have to go round twenty-four times to make up a day. If both were required—a complete circuit of the sun and the customary duration of this—we could not call it a day if the sun traveled through its whole circuit in the space of an hour, nor could we if the sun stopped and as much time elapsed as it usually takes to run its whole course from morning to morning.

My question now is not, therefore, what is it that we call a day, but what is time itself, the time whereby we would be able to measure the sun's revolution and say that it had been completed in only half the usual time, if the circuit had occupied only that space of time represented by twelve hours? We could compare the two periods in terms of time and say that one

was twice the length of the other, and this would still be possible even if the sun sometimes took the single period, and sometimes the double, to circle from the east and back to the east again. Let no one tell me, then, that time is simply the motion of the heavenly bodies. After all, at the prayer of a certain man the sun halted so that he could press home the battle to victory.⁸¹ The sun stood still, but time flowed on its way, and that fight had all the time it needed to be carried through to the finish.

I see, therefore, that time is a kind of strain or tension.⁸² But do I really see it? Or only seem to see? You will show me, O Light, O Truth.

24. 31. Are you commanding me to agree with someone who says that time is the motion of a body? You do not so command me. No corporeal object moves except within time: this is what I hear; this is what you tell me. But that a corporeal object's movement is itself time I do not hear; this you do not say. When a body moves, I measure in terms of time how long it is in motion, from the moment when it begins until its motion ceases. If I did not notice when it began, and it continues to move without my seeing when it stops, I cannot measure the time, except perhaps the interval between the moment when I began to watch and that when I ceased to observe it. If my observation is prolonged, I can only say that the process went on for a long time; I cannot say exactly how long, because when we add a definite indication of a length of time we do so by reference to some agreed standard. "This is as long as that," we say, or "This is twice as long as that other," or something similar. If, on the other hand, we have been able to note the position of some corporeal object when it moves (or when parts of it move, if, for example, it is being turned on a lathe), and we have observed its starting-point and its point of arrival, then we are able to state how much time has elapsed while the movement of the object was effected from the one place to the other, or how long it has taken to revolve on its axis.

Therefore if the motion of an object is one thing, and the standard by which we measure its duration another, is it not obvious which of the two has the stronger claim to be called time? Moreover, if the motion is irregular, so that the object is sometimes moving and sometimes stationary, we measure not only its motion but also its static periods in terms of time, and

81. See Jos 10:12-13.

82. *Distentio*: extension, but with a subjective charge of distraction or anxiety of soul, like being stretched on a rack. See 26,33 below.

say, "Its stationary periods were equivalent in length to its phases of motion," or "It was stationary for two or three times as long as it was in motion," or whatever else our calculation has ascertained or estimated roughly—more or less, as we customarily say. Clearly, then, time is not the movement of any corporeal object.

25. 32. I confess to you, Lord,⁸³ that even today I am still ignorant of what time is; but I praise you, Lord, for the fact that I know I am making this avowal within time, and for my realization that within time I am talking about time at such length, and that I know this "length" itself is long only because time has been passing all the while. But how can I know that, when I do not know what time is? Or perhaps I simply do not know how to articulate what I know? Woe is me, for I do not even know what I do not know!

Behold me here before you, O my God; see that I do not lie.⁸⁴ As I speak, this is the true state of my heart. You, you alone, will light my lamp, O Lord; O my God, you will illumine my darkness.⁸⁵

Perhaps time is tension of our consciousness

26. 33. Am I not making a truthful confession to you when I praise you for my ability to measure time? But this must mean, O my God, that though I can measure it, I do not know what I am measuring! I measure the movement of a body in terms of time, but surely I am by that same calculation measuring time itself? Would it be possible for me to measure a body's motion, to calculate how long it lasts and how long the object takes to travel from here to there, without also measuring the time within which the motion occurs? With what, then, do I measure time itself? Do we measure a longer time by the standard of a shorter, as we use the cubit to measure the span of a cross-beam? That indeed seems to be how we measure the quantity of a long syllable by that of a short syllable, and decide that the former is twice as long. Similarly we measure the length of poems by the length of their lines, and the length of the lines by the length of the feet, and the length of each foot by the length of its syllables, and the length of a long syllable by that of a short syllable. We do not reckon by the

83. See Ps 9:2(1); Mt 11:25; Lk 10:21.

84. See Gal 1:20.

85. See Ps 17:29(18:28).

number of pages—that would be to impose a spatial, not a temporal standard—but by the pronunciation as voices recite them and die away. We declare, “That is a lengthy poem, for it consists of so many lines; the lines are long, since each is composed of so many feet; the feet are long, since each extends over so many syllables; and a syllable is long, when it is twice the quantity of a short one.”

But the mensuration of time by these methods yields no result that is absolute, since it may happen that the sound of a shorter line, spoken with a drawl, actually lasts longer than that of a longer one hurried over. The same holds for the whole poem, a foot, and a syllable.

I have therefore come to the conclusion that time is nothing other than tension: but tension of what, I do not know, and I would be very surprised if it is not tension of consciousness itself.⁸⁶ What am I measuring, I beg you to tell me, my God, when I say in imprecise terms, “This is longer than that,” or even, precisely, “This is twice that”? That I am measuring time, I know; but I am not measuring future time, because it does not yet exist, nor present time, which is a point without extension, nor past time, which exists no more. What, then, am I measuring? Time as it passes by, but not once it has passed? That was what I said earlier.⁸⁷

27. 34. Stick to it, now, my mind, and pay close attention. God is our ally;⁸⁸ and he made us, not we ourselves.⁸⁹ Mark where truth brightens to the dawn!

Suppose now that a physical voice begins to sound ... and goes on sounding ... and is still sounding ... and now stops. Now there is silence, and that voice is past and is a voice no longer. Before it sounded forth it was a future thing, so it could not be measured because it did not yet exist; neither can it be now, because it exists no more. Perhaps, then, it could be measured while it was sounding forth, because something did then exist that could be measured? But at that time it was not standing still; it was but

86. Augustine's typical contribution is to locate the mystery of time within the conscious mind. Plotinus' statement that “the soul contained an unquiet faculty,” something restless that by aspiring toward what seemed a fuller life than Eternity brought time into being (see *Enneads* III,7,11), has been adduced as a predecessor, but Plotinus is referring to the All-Soul, the Cosmic Soul.

87. That is, in XI,16,21;21,27.

88. See Ps 61:9(62:8).

89. See Ps 99(100):3. The allusion has special point here. Throughout the preceding argument Augustine has been exposing the self-delusory habits of thought which tempt us to deny our radical tendency to non-being, our ephemerality, by pretending to some kind of permanence. We have in reality no control over the constant “passing away” which is the law of our being. Only God, our creator, is eternal: “he made us.”

a fleeting thing that was speeding on its way. Was it therefore any more measurable while sounding than before or after? Only as something transient was it extended over a period of time whereby it might be measured—only as transient, because the present moment has no duration. If it is argued that the sound could, nevertheless, be measured while it lasted, consider this: another voice begins to sound and is still sounding in a continuous, steady tone. Let us measure it, then, while it is sounding, for once it has fallen silent it will be a thing of the past, and nothing measurable will then exist. By all means let us measure it now, and state how long it lasts.

Ah, but it is still sounding, and there is no way of timing it except from its beginning, when the sound originated, to its end, when it ceases. Obviously we measure any interval of time from some inception to some ending. Hence the sound of a voice which has not yet finished cannot be measured in such a way that anyone can say how long or how short it is, nor can it be declared to be of the same length as something else, or half the length, or twice the length, or anything of the kind. But once finished, it will not exist. So by what criteria will it then be subject to measurement?

All the same we do measure periods of time, not periods which as yet have no being, nor those which have ceased to be, nor those which have no duration, nor those which have no terminus. We measure neither future nor past nor present nor passing time. Yet time we do measure.

35. Take the line, *Deus, creator omnium*.⁹⁰ This line consists of eight syllables, short and long alternating. The four short ones—the first, third, fifth and seventh—are thus half the length of the four long ones—the second, fourth, sixth and eighth. Each of these latter lasts twice as long as each of the former; I have only to pronounce the line to report that this is the case, insofar as clear sense-perception can verify it. Relying on this unmistakable evidence of my ear I measure each long syllable by the criterion of a short one, and perceive that it is twice the quantity. But the syllables make themselves heard in succession; and if the first is short and the second long, how am I to hold on to the short one, how am I to apply it to the long one as a measuring-rod in order to discover that the long one has twice the quantity, when the long one does not begin to sound until the short one has ceased? Am I to measure the long one while it is present? Impossible, because I cannot measure something unfinished. But its

90. Ambrose's evening hymn; see IX,12,32 for a translation and indications of Augustine's affection for it.

completion is its passing away, so what now exists for me to measure? Where is the short syllable I was going to use as a standard? What has become of the long one I want to measure? Both have made their sound, and flown away, and passed by, and exist no more; yet I do my calculation and confidently assert that insofar as the testimony of my trained ear can be trusted, the short is half the long, the long twice the short; and obviously I am speaking about a space of time. I can only do this because the syllables have passed away and are completed. Evidently, then, what I am measuring is not the syllables themselves, which no longer exist, but something in my memory, something fixed and permanent there.

36. In you, my mind, I measure time. Do not interrupt me by clamoring that time has objective existence, nor hinder yourself with the hurly-burly of your impressions. In you, I say, do I measure time. What I measure is the impression which passing phenomena leave in you, which abides after they have passed by: that is what I measure as a present reality, not the things that passed by so that the impression could be formed. The impression itself is what I measure when I measure intervals of time. Hence either time is this impression, or what I measure is not time.

What about when we measure silences, and say that this silent pause lasted as long as that sound? Do we not strain our thought to retain the feeling of a sound's duration, as though it were still audible, so as to be able to estimate the intervals of silence in relation to the whole space of time in question? Without any articulate word or even opening our mouths we go over in our minds poems, their lines, a speech, and we assess their developmental patterns and the time they occupied in relation to one another; and our estimate is no different from what it would have been if we had been reciting them aloud.

Suppose a person wishes to utter a fairly long sound, and has determined beforehand in his own mind how long it is to be. He must have first thought through that period of time in silence and committed the impression of it to memory; then he begins to utter the sound, which continues until it reaches the predetermined end. Or rather, it does not "continue," because the sound is evidently both something already heard and something still to be heard, for the part of it already completed is sound that has been, but the part that remains is sound still to be. Thus it is carried through as our present awareness drags what is future into the past. As the future dwindles the past grows, until the future is used up altogether and the whole thing is past.

28. 37. But how can a future which does not yet exist dwindle or be used up, and how can a past which no longer exists grow? Only because there are three realities in the mind which conducts this operation. The mind expects, and attends, and remembers, so that what it expects passes by way of what it attends to into what it remembers. No one, surely, would deny that the future is as yet non-existent? Yet an expectation of future events does exist in the mind. And would anyone deny that the past has ceased to be? Yet the memory of past events still lives on in the mind. And who would deny that the present has no duration, since it passes in an instant? Yet our attention does endure, and through our attention what is still to be makes its way into the state where it is no more. It is not, therefore, future time which is long, for it does not exist; a long future is simply an expectation of the future which represents it as long. Nor is the past a long period of time, because it does not exist at all; a long past is simply a memory of the past which represents it as long.

38. Suppose I have to recite a poem I know by heart. Before I begin, my expectation is directed to the whole poem, but once I have begun, whatever I have plucked away from the domain of expectation and tossed behind me to the past becomes the business of my memory, and the vital energy of what I am doing is in tension between the two of them: it strains toward my memory because of the part I have already recited, and to my expectation on account of the part I still have to speak. But my attention is present all the while, for the future is being channeled through it to become the past. As the poem goes on and on, expectation is curtailed and memory prolonged, until expectation is entirely used up, when the whole completed action has passed into memory.

What is true of the poem as a whole is true equally of its individual stanzas and syllables. The same is true of the whole long performance, in which this poem may be a single item. The same thing happens in the entirety of a person's life, of which all his actions are parts; and the same in the entire sweep of human history, the parts of which are individual human lives.

Our time and God's eternity

29, 39. Because your mercy is better than many a life⁹¹ I confess that my life is no more than anxious distraction; but in my Lord, the Son of Man, your right hand upholds me.⁹² He stands as mediator between you, the one God, and us, the many,⁹³ who are pulled many ways by multifarious distractions. In him your right hand holds me fast, so that I may grasp that for which I have been grasped myself, and may be gathered in from dispersion in my stale days to pursue the One, forgetting the past and stretching undistracted not to future things doomed to pass away, but to my eternal goal. With no distracted mind but with focused attention I press on to the prize of our heavenly calling,⁹⁴ to that place where I yearn to hear songs of praise⁹⁵ and contemplate your delight,⁹⁶ which neither comes, nor slips away.

Now as my years waste away amid groaning⁹⁷ you are my solace, Lord, because you are my Father, and you are eternal. But I have leapt down into the flux of time where all is confusion to me. In the most intimate depths of my soul my thoughts are torn to fragments by tempestuous changes until that time when I flow into you, purged and rendered molten by the fire of your love.

30, 40. I will stand still,⁹⁸ then, and find firm footing in you, in your Truth who is shaping me to himself, and no longer will I tolerate the questions of people who, sickly under sin's punishment, crave more than they can take in. "What was God doing before he made heaven and earth?" they ask. "Why did it enter his head to make something, when he had never made anything before?" Grant them, Lord, the grace to think clearly what they are saying, and to realize that the word "never" has no meaning where time does not exist. If God is said never to have done something, that simply means that he did not do it at any time.⁹⁹ Let such people see, then, that there cannot be any time apart from creation, and stop talking

91. See Ps 62:4(63:3).

92. See Pss 17:36(18:35); 62:9(63:8). So time, the sign of our ephemerality which we are prone to deny, becomes the place where grace finds us in the incarnate Word.

93. See 1 Tm 2:5.

94. See Phil 3:12-14.

95. See Ps 25(26):7.

96. See Ps 26(27):4.

97. See Ps 30:11(31:10).

98. See Phil 4:1; 1 Thes 3:8.

99. That is, "before" and "after" are words expressing relationships between events within the totality of events. They have no application to anything that stands outside the totality of events altogether.

nonsense.¹⁰⁰ Let them even stretch their minds to what lies ahead¹⁰¹ and understand that you exist before all ages of time, because you are the eternal creator of all times, and that no time is coeternal with you, nor any creature whatsoever, even if any was created outside time.¹⁰²

31, 41. How deep is that mystery hidden in the secret recesses of your being, O Lord, my God! And how far from it have the consequences of my sins hurled me! Heal my eyes, that I may rejoice with you in your light.

It could be said with certainty that if there is anywhere a person whose mind is so richly endowed, whose knowledge and foresight are so vast, that he knows all past and all future things in the same way that I know a song that is very familiar to me, such a mind is wonderful, so amazing as to fill us with awe, since nothing that has happened and nothing still to come throughout the ages is hidden from it, even as nothing in the song I am singing is hidden from me, whatever portions of it have passed away since its opening, and whatever parts remain before its end. But far be it from us to suppose that you, the creator of the universe, creator of souls and bodies, know all things future and past in this fashion! Perish the thought! Far, far more wonderful is your mode of knowing, and far more mysterious. When a person is singing words well known to him, or listening to a familiar song, his senses are strained between anticipating sounds still to come and remembering those sung already; but with you it is quite otherwise. Nothing can happen to you in your unchangeable eternity, you who are truly the eternal creator of all minds. As you knew heaven and earth in the beginning, without the slightest modification in your knowledge, so too you made heaven and earth in the beginning without any distension in your activity.

Let anyone who understands this praise you, and anyone who does not understand it praise you no less. Oh, how high and glorious you are, who make the humble-hearted your home!¹⁰³ You help the downtrodden to their feet,¹⁰⁴ and they do not fall, for their high dignity is yourself.

100. See Ps 143(144):8.

101. See Phil 3:13.

102. Augustine is thinking of the possibility that the angels may have been, a question he discusses in his *Unfinished Literal Commentary on Genesis* III,7 and *The City of God* XII,16.

103. See Ps 137(138):6; Dn 3:87; Is 57:15.

104. See Pss 144(145):14; 145(146):8.