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THE WORKS OF SAINT AUGUSTINE

A Translation for the 21st Century

Part I – Books

Volume 12:

Responses to Miscellaneous Questions

THE WORKS OF SAINT AUGUSTINE

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Responses to Miscellaneous Questions

Miscellany of Eighty-Three Questions
(*De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus*)
Miscellany of Questions in Response to Simplician
(*Ad Simplicianum de diversis quaestionibus*)
and Eight Questions of Dulcitius
(*De octo Dulcitii quaestionibus*)

1/12

introduction, translation and notes by
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New City Press
Hyde Park, New York

2008

the law is very commonly referred to in the context of warning and instilling fear and punishing. And so the same precept is law for the fearful and grace for those who love. Hence it says in the gospel, *The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth were brought about through Jesus Christ* (Jn 1:17). This very same law, which was given through Moses in order to inspire fear, became grace and truth through Jesus Christ in order to be fulfilled. Therefore it was said, *You died to the law* (Rom 7:4) as though to say that you died to the law's punishment, *through the body of Christ* (Rom 7:4), through which the sins have been forgiven that were under the constraint deserving of lawful punishment.

Why do the passions of sin stem from the law if the law is good? Because he [i.e., the Apostle] wanted them to be understood here as the passions of sin that have already been frequently spoken of, an increase of covetousness resulting from prohibition and the guilt of punishment resulting from transgression—that is, because *it worked death through what was good, so that the sinner and the sin might, thanks to the commandment, be without limit.*

Why are we freed from the law, in which imprisonment we were dead, so that thus we may serve in the new way of the spirit and not in the old way of the letter, if the law is good? Because the law is the letter for those who do not fulfill it through the spirit of love, which is the domain of the New Testament. And so those who have died to sin are freed from the letter in which are imprisoned the wrongdoers who do not fulfill what is written. For what is the law other than a letter, pure and simple, for those who know how to read it but are unable to fulfill it? For it is not unknown to those for whom it was written, but, inasmuch as it is known only to the extent that it is read as a piece of writing and not to the extent that it is fulfilled as an object of love, it is nothing but a letter for such persons. This letter is not a help to its readers but rather a witness against sinners. Those who are renewed through the spirit, then, are freed from its condemnation so that they are no longer bound to the punishment of the letter but are united to its understanding through righteousness. This is why it says, *The letter kills, but the spirit gives life* (2 Cor 3:6). For the law, if it is only read but not understood and not fulfilled, does indeed kill; it is then that it is called "the letter." But the spirit gives life, because the fullness of the law is the love which *has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us* (Rom 5:5).

Second Question

2,1. But now, in my opinion, it is time to pass on to the second question that you posed. It is a matter of discussing the entire text from where it is written: *As well as that* [i.e., Sarah's story], *there is also Rebecca, who from a single act of intercourse conceived from our father Isaac. For when they were not yet born and had not done anything good or evil* (Rom 9:10-11) up to the point where it is written: *Unless the Lord of hosts had left us offspring, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been like Gomorrah* (Rom 9:29). This is exceedingly obscure. But I know for a certainty that, because of your feelings in my regard, you could not request me to interpret these words unless you had interceded with the Lord that I could do so. Having been reassured by this help, I proceed.

2,2. And in the first place I shall seize upon the Apostle's main thought, which is evident throughout the epistle that I am going to consider. Now this is that no one should boast of the merits of his works. The Israelites dared to boast of them on the grounds that they had observed the law that had been given to them¹³ and so had received the grace of the gospel as though it were due them for their merits, because they observed the law. Hence they did not want that same grace to be given to the gentiles, whom they saw as unworthy, unless they took up the Jewish sacraments¹⁴ (which is an issue that, when it arose, was dealt with in the Acts of the Apostles¹⁵). For they did not understand that the grace of the gospel is not dependent on works; otherwise grace is no longer grace.¹⁶

And in many places [the Apostle] frequently testifies that grace comes before works not in order to do away with works but in order to show that works do not precede but follow upon faith—in other words, so that a person may not think that he has obtained grace because he has done good works but that he cannot do good works unless he has obtained grace through faith.¹⁷ But a person begins to obtain grace when he begins to believe in God, having been moved to faith by either an internal or an external urging.¹⁸

Now it is important to know if grace is poured out more fully and more manifestly at certain moments of time or at the celebration of the sacraments. For catechumens do not lack belief; if they do, then Cornelius, to whom an

13. See Rom 2:17-23.

14. On the broad understanding of the term "sacrament" in Christian antiquity see p. 50, note 43. Here of course the word refers to Old Testament rituals and observances.

15. See Acts 15.

16. See Rom 11:6.

17. See Rom 5:2.

18. See Rom 10:14.

angel was sent, did not believe in God when he was making himself worthy through his almsgiving and prayers.¹⁹ But in no way would he have done these things unless he had believed beforehand; in no way would he have believed, however, unless he had been called by secret urgings that his mind or spirit could perceive or by more evident ones coming to him through his bodily senses.²⁰ But in certain persons, like catechumens and like Cornelius himself, before he was incorporated into the Church by participating in the sacraments, the grace of faith, as great as it is, is insufficient to attain to the kingdom of heaven;²¹ but in others it so great that they are already counted as belonging to the body of Christ and to the holy temple of God. *For the temple of God is holy*, [the Apostle] says, *which you are* (1 Cor 3:17). And the Lord himself says, *Unless a person has been born of water and the Holy Spirit he shall not enter the kingdom of heaven* (Jn 3:5). Certain beginnings of faith, therefore, are like conceptions. Yet, in order to arrive at eternal life, one must not only be conceived but also be born. But none of this is without the grace of God's mercy, because even if works that are good follow that grace, as they say, they do not precede it.

2,3. The Apostle wishes to emphasize this, because as he says in another passage, *It is not because of us but is a gift of God; it is not because of works, lest perhaps anyone be inflated* (Eph 2:8-9). Therefore he provided proof by referring to those who had not yet been born. For no one could say that Jacob, who was not yet born, had been meritorious before God on account of his works, so that it might be said as divinely inspired: *The older shall serve the younger* (Gn 25:23). Therefore he says, *It was not only Isaac who was promised* (Rom 9:10) when it was said, *At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son* (Rom 9:9). [Isaac] had certainly not been meritorious before God on account of any works so that a promise would be made that he was to be born, so that the seed of Abraham would be named in Isaac²²—that is, that they would share in the lot of the saints, which is in Christ, understanding that they were children of the promise²³ and not boasting of their own merits but attributing the fact that they were co-heirs in Christ²⁴ to the grace of their calling.²⁵ For, when it was promised that they would exist, they who did not yet exist had been deserving of nothing. [And he continues:] *But also Rebecca, who from a single act of intercourse conceived from our father Isaac*

19. See Acts 10:1-4.

20. See Rom 10:14.

21. See Acts 10:44-48.

22. See Rom 9:7.

23. See Rom 9:8.

24. See Rom 8:17.

25. See Rom 9:12.

(Rom 9:10). He says with great precision, *from a single act of intercourse*. For it was twins who were conceived. Otherwise it might be attributed to the father's merits, and someone could say that such and such a son was born because his father was influenced in a particular way at the time when he sowed him in his mother's womb, or his mother was influenced in a particular way when she conceived him. For he sowed both at the same time and she conceived both at the same time. [Paul] says *from a single act of intercourse* in order to emphasize that there is no room for astrologers here or rather for those whom they call *genethliaci*, who make conjectures about behaviors and destinies on the basis of people's birthdays.²⁶ For they have no idea what to say when the one conception occurs at one precise moment, when the heavens and the stars are arranged in a particular way so that no differences whatsoever in this respect can be discerned with regard to either of the twins, and [yet] there is a great difference between them. And, if they wish, they can easily see that the oracles which they sell to wretched people come not from a familiarity with any scientific theory but from fortuitous inkings.²⁷

But (to speak rather of the matter at hand) these things are recalled for the purpose of smashing and overturning the pride of persons who are unthankful for the grace of God and who dare to boast of their own merits. *For when they were not yet born and had not done anything good or evil, not because of their works but because of him who called them it was said to her that the older would serve the younger* (Rom 9:11-12). Grace, then, comes from him who calls, but good works come as a consequence from him who receives grace; they do not beget grace but are begotten by grace. For a fire does not heat *in order* to burn but *because* it burns, nor does a wheel run well *in order* to be round but *because* it is round. Thus no one does good works *in order* to receive grace but *because* he has received it. For how can a person live righteously who has not been made righteous? In the same way that a person cannot live holily who has not been made holy or live at all if he has not been given life. It is grace that makes righteous,²⁸ so that one who has been made righteous can live righteously. Grace, therefore, comes first, and good works are second. As [the Apostle] says in another passage, *To a person who works, wages are owed not as a grace but as a debt* (Rom 4:4). A case in point would be if immortality following upon good works were demanded as a debt. In the words of the same

26. *Genethliaci*: the Latin form of a Greek word meaning "pertaining to the day of one's birth."

27. The case of twins with different life histories was a classic objection to the claims of astrologers that the arrangement of the heavens at the time of conception or birth was determinative of a person's life course. Augustine, who emphasizes the single moment of Jacob and Esau's conception, often avails himself of this objection. See *Confessions* VII,6,8-10; *Teaching Christianity* II,22,33-34; *The City of God* V,1-6.

28. See Rom 3:24.

[Apostle]: *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. For the rest there remains for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the just judge, will render me on that day.* (2 Tm 4:7-8) For, perhaps because he said *will render* (*reddet*), it is a matter of debt. But when he ascended on high and led captivity captive, he did not render but *gave* (*dedit*) gifts to men.²⁹ For how would the Apostle himself presume that a debt, as it were, was being rendered to him if he had not first received a grace that was not owed him, by which, as one who had been made righteous,³⁰ he could fight the good fight? For he had been a blasphemer and a persecutor and a reviler, but he obtained mercy, as he himself testifies,³¹ believing in him who makes righteous not the one who is upright but the one who is wicked, so that he may make him upright by making him righteous.³²

2.4. *Not because of their works*, he says, *but because of him who called them it was said, to her that the older would serve the younger* (Rom 9:12). To this pertains what was said, *For when they were not yet born and had not done anything good or evil* (Rom 9:11), so that it could be said, *Not because of their works but because of him who called them*. This is why a person may ask why he said, *That God's purpose would abide in accordance with his choice* (Rom 9:11). For how is a choice righteous or of any quality at all when there is no distinction [between persons]? For if Jacob, who was not yet born and had not yet done any works, was not chosen on account of any merit, he could not have been chosen in any sense of the word when there was no difference [between him and his brother] on the basis of which he might be chosen. Likewise, if Esau, who also was not yet born and had not yet done any works, was not rejected on account of any merit when it was said, *And the older shall serve the younger*, how can his rejection be called righteous? Based on what act of discernment and on what equitable judgment are we to understand what follows: *I loved Jacob but I hated Esau* (Rom 9:13)? This was, to be sure, written in a prophet, who long afterwards prophesied how they were born and died.³³ Yet that phrase, *And the older shall serve the younger*, seems to have been used both before they were born and before they did any works. How could this or any other choice be made if, since they were not yet born and had not yet done any works, they had no opportunities for merit? Were they perhaps somehow of different natures? Who could claim this, inasmuch as they had the same father and the same mother, came from a single act of inter-

29. See Eph 4:8.

30. See Rom 3:24.

31. See 1 Tm 1:13.

32. See Rom 4:5.

33. See Mal 1:2-3.

course and had the same creator? As the same creator brought forth from the same earth different living and self-reproducing beings,³⁴ did he from the same union and embrace of [two] human beings bring forth different offspring in twins, one whom he loved and another whom he hated? There would be no choice, therefore, until there was something to be chosen. For if Jacob was made good so that he would be pleasing, how was he pleasing before he was made, so that he would be made good? And so he was not chosen in order to be made good but, once made good, he was able to be chosen.

2.5. Is it *in accordance with his choice* that God, knowing all things in advance, would see future faith in Jacob, who was not yet born? Thus, although a person does not merit to be made righteous because of his works, since in fact he cannot do good works unless he is made righteous, yet, inasmuch as God makes the pagans righteous by faith³⁵ and no one believes except by free will, did God foresee this very future will to believe and in his foreknowledge choose someone who was not yet even born in order to make him righteous? If a choice is made through foreknowledge, then, and God foreknew Jacob's faith, how do you prove that he did not also choose him because of his works? If it was the case, then, that they had not yet been born and had not yet done anything either good or evil, it was also the case that neither of them had yet believed. But foreknowledge sees who will believe. Thus foreknowledge could see who would do works, so that, as one person may be said to have been chosen because of a future faith that God foreknew, another could say that he, for his part, was chosen because of future works that God likewise foreknew. How, then, does the Apostle show that these words, *The older shall serve the younger*, were not said on account of works? Because if they were not yet born, it applied not only to works but also to faith, since those who were not yet born lacked both. He did not want it to be understood, therefore, that it was the result of foreknowledge that the younger was chosen with a view to his being served by the older. For he wanted to show that this did not happen because of works, and so he added the words, *For when they were not yet born and had not done anything good or evil*; otherwise it could have been said to him, "But God already knew who was going to do what." The question, therefore, is just how that choice was made. Because if it was not based on works, which did not exist in those who were not yet born, nor based on faith, because that itself did not exist, how then did it happen?

2.6. Must it be said that there would have been no choice had there not been some difference in their mother's womb, whether of faith or of works or of

34. See Gn 1:24.

35. See Gal 3:8.

some kind of merits, whatever they might have been? But it is said that *God's purpose would abide in accordance with his choice*, and so we try to discover why it was said. Perhaps this sentence should be construed in a different way—so that we would not understand the words, *so that God's purpose would abide in accordance with his choice*, as following on from *not because of their works but because of him who called them* was it said that the older would serve the younger but rather as referring to the example given of persons yet unborn, who have not yet accomplished any works, so that no choice [based on works] could be understood here. *For when they were not yet born and had not done anything good or evil, so that God's purpose would abide in accordance with his choice*—that is, *they had not done anything good or evil* which would allow for some choice to be made of a person who had something good, based on that very action. Since, therefore, no choice was made of someone who had done something good, on account of which God's purpose would abide, it was *not because of their works but because of him who called them* that it was said to her that the older would serve the younger. In other words, it was because of him who, by calling the wicked to faith, makes him righteous by grace.³⁶

God's purpose, therefore, does not abide on account of a choice, but the choice results from the purpose—that is, it is not because God discovers in human beings good works that he chooses, and that therefore his plan of making righteous abides, but because it abides in order to make righteous those who believe, and that therefore he discovers works that he may now choose for the kingdom of heaven. For unless a choice were made there would be no chosen ones, nor would it correctly be said, *Who will accuse God's chosen ones?* (Rom 8:33) Yet it is not making a choice that precedes making righteous but making righteous that precedes making a choice. For no one is chosen unless he is already entirely different than a person who is rejected. Hence I do not see how these words, *God chose us before the foundation of the world* (Eph 1:4), could have been said if not with foreknowledge. But what he says here, *Not because of their works but because of him who called them* it was said to her that the older would serve the younger, he wanted to be understood not of a choice based upon merits, which occur after a person has been made righteous by grace, but of the generosity of God's gifts, lest anyone be inflated because of his works. *For by God's grace we have been saved. And this is not because of us but is a gift of God; it is not because of works, lest perhaps anyone be inflated.* (Eph 2:8-9)

36. See Rom 4:5.

2.7. Now the question is whether faith merits humankind's being made righteous. Do faith's merits precede God's mercy, or should even faith itself not be numbered among the gifts of grace? For in the passage where he said, *Not because of their works*, he did *not* say, "Because of their faith it was said to her that the older would serve the younger," but he *did* say, *But because of him who called them*. For no one believes who is not called. But it is a merciful God who calls, bestowing this [gift] when there are no merits of faith, because the merits of faith follow the call rather than precede it. For *how will they believe him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?* (Rom 10:14) If God's mercy does not precede by way of a call, therefore, a person cannot believe, so that from this he may begin to be made righteous and to receive the capacity to do good works. Before every merit, then, there is grace, since Christ died for the wicked.³⁷ Hence it was not because of any merits of his own, but because of him who called, that the younger received [the grace] to be served by the older. This also explains the phrase, *I loved Jacob*, which was because of God who called and not because of Jacob's works.

2.8. What then of Esau? On account of what evil deeds of his did he merit to serve his younger [brother] and to have it written [of him]: *I hated Esau?* For neither had *he* been born yet or done anything good or evil when it was said, *And the older shall serve the younger*. Is it perhaps that, just as that was said of Jacob, who had no merits for any good deed, so Esau was hated, who had no merits for any evil deed? For, if God predestined him to serve his younger [brother] because he foreknew his future evil works and predestined Jacob as well, so that his older [brother] would serve him, because he foreknew his future good works, what he says now is false: *Not because of their works*. But if it is true that this did not occur because of their works and that [God] approves of this, inasmuch as it is said of persons who were not yet born and had not yet done any works, and that it was not done because of faith either, which similarly did not exist in persons not yet born, on the basis of what merit was Esau hated before he was born? For there is no doubt that God loves what he has made. But if we say that he hated what he made, it contradicts another text of scripture that says, *You did not create anything in hatred, but you hate nothing that you have made* (Wis 11:24). For by what merit was the sun made the sun? Or how did the moon offend, that it is so inferior to it? Or how did it merit to be created so much brighter than the other stars? But all of these were

37. See Rom 5:6.

created good, each in its own kind.³⁸ For God would not say, "I loved the sun but I hated the moon," or, "I loved the moon but I hated the stars," as he *did* say, *I loved Jacob but I hated Esau*. But he loved all those things, even though they were placed in different ranks of excellence, because God saw that they were good when he created them by his word.³⁹ But it is unjust that he would have hated Esau when there was no unrighteousness to merit it. If we grant this, then Jacob begins to be loved because of the merit of righteousness. If this is true, then it is false that it is not because of works. Was it perhaps because of the righteousness of faith? How do these words, *For when they were not yet born*, support your position, then, when in fact there could not have been any righteousness of faith in someone who was not yet born?

2,9. And so the Apostle saw what effect his words could have on the mind of his hearer or reader, and he immediately added, *What, then, shall we say? Is there injustice with God? Of course not!* (Rom 9:14) And as if teaching how absurd this is, he says, *For Moses says, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will show compassion to whom I will be compassionate* (Rom 9:15). With these words he solves the problem—or, rather, complicates it further. For this is the very thing that is so disturbing: if he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy and show compassion to whom he will be compassionate, why was this compassion lacking in regard to Esau, so that by it he might have been good, just as by it Jacob became good? Or was this said, *I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will show compassion to whom I will be compassionate*, because God will have mercy on a person in order to call him, will be merciful to him so that he may believe, and will show compassion to him to whom he is compassionate—that is, will make him compassionate, so that he may also do good works? From this we are warned that it is not right for anyone to boast or to be inflated even because of his works of mercy, [saying] that he is deserving of God [by claiming God's works] as if they were his own, when in fact he who will show compassion to whom he will be compassionate showed him the very compassion that he was to have. If a person boasts that he has merited this by believing, he should know that [God], who by inspiring faith has mercy on whom he is merciful, has shown it to him in order to communicate his call to one who was without faith up until that moment. For the one with faith is already differentiated from the wicked. *For what do you have*, he says, *that you have not received? But if you have received, why do you boast as if you had not received?* (1 Cor 4:7)

38. See Gn 1:16-18.

39. See Gn 1:16-18.

2,10. Well said! But why was this compassion withdrawn from Esau? Why was he not called in such a way that, once called, he would be inspired with faith and, as a believer, become compassionate, so that he might do good works? Was it perhaps because he did not will to? If, then, Jacob believed because he willed to, God did not bestow faith on him, but he conferred it upon himself by an act of will, and he had something that he did not receive. Is it the case that, because no one can believe unless he wills to and no one can will to unless he is called, but no one can confer it upon himself to be called, God, by calling, also confers faith, because no one can believe without being called, although no one believes unwillingly? *For how will they believe him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?* And so no one believes who has not been called, but not everyone who has been called believes, *for many are called, but few are chosen* (Mt 20:16); these are the ones who have not disdained him who calls but, by believing, have followed him. Without doubt, however, they have believed willingly. What is this, then, that follows: *It is not a matter of willing or of running, therefore, but of a merciful God* (Rom 9:16)? Can we not will unless we are called, and does our willing count for naught unless God helps to bring it to completion? It is necessary, then, to will and to run, for it was not without purpose that it was said, *Peace on earth to men of good will* (Lk 2:14), and, *Run in such a way that you may seize the prize* (1 Cor 9:24). Yet it is not a matter of willing or of running but of a merciful God that we obtain what we will and arrive where we will. Esau did not will, therefore, and did not run. But, if he had both willed and run, he would have arrived with the help of God, who would also have bestowed willing and running upon him by calling him if he had not, by disdaining the call, made himself disapproved. For in one way God bestows so that we may will, and in another he bestows what we have willed. For he has willed that our willing be both his and ours—his by calling and ours by following. He alone bestows, however, what we have willed—that is, the ability to act well and to live blessedly forever. But Esau, who was not yet born, could neither will nor not will anything. Why, then, was he disapproved when he was in the womb? This brings us back to those difficulties which are all the more complex by reason of both their obscurity and also our frequent repetition.

2,11. For why was Esau, who was not yet born, disapproved, when he was unable to have faith in him who called him or to disdain his call or to do anything either good or evil? If God foreknew his [i.e., Esau's] future evil will, why was Jacob not also approved through God's foreknowledge of his future good will? If you but once concede that a person could have been either approved or disapproved on the basis of what was not yet in him but because God foreknew what was going to be in him, it follows that he could also have

been approved on the basis of the works that God foreknew were going to be in him, although he had not yet done any works, and the fact that they were not yet born when it was said, *The older shall serve the younger*, will not support your position at all, since you must then show that this was not said because of works, inasmuch as he had not yet done any works.

2,12. If you also pay close attention to these words, *It is not a matter of willing or of running, therefore, but of a merciful God*, the Apostle will be seen to have said this because it is not only by God's help that we attain to what we will but also in the context of that effort to which he refers in another text: *Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who, for the sake of a good will, works in you both the willing and the working.* (Phil 2:12-13) Here he shows clearly that even a good will itself comes about in us through God's working. For if it is only said that it is not a matter of willing but of a merciful God, because the human will does not suffice for us to live in rectitude and righteousness unless we are aided by God's mercy, it can therefore also be said that it is not a matter of a merciful God but of human willing, because God's mercy alone does not suffice unless our will's consent is joined to it. But it is evident that we will to no avail unless God is merciful. I do not know how it may be said, on the other hand, that God is merciful to no avail unless we will. For if God is merciful, we also will. It pertains to the same mercy, in fact, that we will, *for it is God who, for the sake of a good will, works in us both the willing and the working.* For if we asked whether a good will was God's gift, it would be strange if someone dared to deny it. For, since it is not a good will that precedes a call but a call that precedes a good will, it is rightly ascribed to God who calls that we will what is good, but it cannot be ascribed to us that we are called. It must not be thought, then, that these words, *It is not a matter of willing or of running but of a merciful God*, were said because without his aid we cannot attain to what we will but rather because without his call we do not will.

2,13. But if this call brings about a good will in such a way that everyone who has been called follows it [i.e., the call], how is it correct that *many are called, but few are chosen* (Mt 20:16)? If this is correct and the one who has been called does not follow and submit to the call, because it is built into his will not to submit, it can also rightly be said that it is not a matter of God's being merciful but of man's willing and running, because the mercy of him who calls is insufficient unless there follows the obedience of the one who has been called. What if those who have been called in this way do not consent? Could they, if called in another way, accommodate their will to faith? Thus this would be correct: *Many are called, but few are chosen*, so that, although many have been called in one way, yet, because not all have been touched in

one way, only they would follow the call who are found fit to grasp it. And this would be no less correct: *It is not a matter of willing or of running, therefore, but of a merciful God*, who called in a way that was appropriate for those who followed the call. The call has indeed reached others, but because it was such that they could not be moved by it and were not suited to grasp it, they could indeed be said to have been called but not chosen, and it is no longer similarly correct that it is not a matter of God's being merciful but of man's willing and running. For the effectiveness of God's mercy cannot be in man's power, so that he would be merciful to no avail if man were unwilling, because, if he should will to have mercy even on those persons [who were mentioned shortly before], he could call them in such a way as would be appropriate for them, so that they would be moved and would understand and would follow. This, then, is correct: *Many are called, but few are chosen*. For the chosen are those who have been called in an appropriate way, whereas those who did not consent and were not obedient to the call are not chosen, because they did not follow even though they were called. Likewise this is correct: *It is not a matter of willing or of running but of a merciful God*, because, even if he calls many, he still has mercy on those whom he calls in such a way as is appropriate for them to be called so that they may follow. It is incorrect, however, if anyone says that it is not a matter of God's being merciful but of man's willing and running, because God has mercy on no one in vain. But the person on whom he has mercy he calls in such a way as he knows is appropriate for him, so that he may not reject him who calls.

2,14. At this point someone will say, "Why, then, was Esau not called in such a way that he would will to obey?" For we see that others have been moved to faith when these same things have been shown or signified. For example, Simeon, when the Spirit revealed it to him, recognized our Lord Jesus Christ when he was still a tiny infant and believed in him.⁴⁰ Nathanael, when he had heard one sentence of his, *Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you* (Jn 1:48), responded, *Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the king of Israel* (Jn 1:49). When Peter confessed this much later, he merited to hear that he was blessed and that the keys of the kingdom of heaven would be given to him.⁴¹ When the miracle was performed at Cana in Galilee that the evangelist John mentions as the first of his signs, when water was turned into wine, his disciples believed in him.⁴² When he spoke he invited many to faith,

40. See Lk 2:25-35.

41. See Mt 16:16-19.

42. See Jn 2:1-11.

but there were many who did not believe when he raised the dead.⁴³ Even the disciples were terrified by his cross and death and wavered,⁴⁴ yet the thief believed when he saw him not as one more excellent in his deeds but as his equal in the fellowship of the cross.⁴⁵ After his resurrection one of the band of disciples believed not so much because of his living members as because of his fresh wounds.⁴⁶ There were many from the number of those by whom he was crucified who saw him performing miracles and disdained him, but they believed his disciples when they preached him and did similar things in his name.⁴⁷

Since, therefore, one person is moved to faith in one way while another is moved in another way, and frequently the same thing said to one person at one time moves him but said to another at another time does not move him, and it moves one and does not move another, who would dare to say that God lacked that way of calling by which Esau as well could have applied his mind and joined his will to that faith in which Jacob was made righteous?

If the resistance of a person's will can be so great that a mental revulsion hardens him against any manner of calling, it may be asked whether this very hardening comes from a divine punishment, when God has abandoned a person by not calling him in such a way that he will be moved to faith. For who would say that the manner in which he might be persuaded to have faith was lacking to the Almighty?

2,15. But why do we ask this? For the Apostle himself adds, *For in scripture [God] says to Pharaoh, It was for this that I raised you up, so that I might display my power in you and so that my name might be made known throughout the earth* (Rom 9:17). The Apostle appended this statement, however, in order to prove what he had said before: *It is not a matter of willing or of running, therefore, but of a merciful God*. For as though he were being asked what the source of his teaching was, he declares, *For in scripture [God] says to Pharaoh, It was for this that I raised you up, so that I might display my power in you and so that my name might be made known throughout the earth*. In this way he shows that *it is not a matter of willing or of running but of a merciful God*, and he concludes as follows, *Therefore he has mercy on whom he wills, and whom he wills he hardens* (Rom 9:18), since neither had been mentioned previously. For these words, *It is not a matter of willing or of running but of a merciful God*, are not said in the same way that these others are: "It is not a matter of being unwilling or of disdaining but of a God who

43. See Lk 16:13.

44. See Mt 26:56.

45. See Lk 23:40-42.

46. See Jn 20:27-29.

47. See Acts 2:37-41; 5:12-16.

hardens." From this it becomes clear that what [the Apostle] previously said, *Therefore he has mercy on whom he wills, and whom he wills he hardens*, can fit in with the previous phrase [i.e., *It is not a matter of willing or of running but of a merciful God*] so that [it is understood that] God's hardening is an unwillingness to be merciful. Thus he imposes nothing whereby a person may become worse, but nothing is given to the person whereby he may become better. If this occurs when there is no difference in merits, who would not burst out into those words that the very Apostle uses against himself: *And so you say to me, Why is there still complaint? For who resists his will?* (Rom 9:19) For God often complains of human beings, as is clear from countless passages of scripture, because they are unwilling to believe and to live uprightly. Hence those who are faithful and carry out God's will are said to live *without giving rise to complaint* (Lk 1:6), because scripture does not complain of them. But why is there complaint, he asks, *for one who resists his will* (Rom 9:18), when *he has mercy on whom he wills, and whom he wills he hardens*? Yet let us consider what was said previously, and on that basis let us, to the degree that the Lord himself assists, shape our own perspective.

2,16. For he said shortly before, *What, then, shall we say? Is there injustice with God? Of course not!* Let this, then, be something fixed and settled in minds that are devoutly serious and steadfast in faith—that there is no injustice with God. And thus this very thing—that *God has mercy on whom he wills, and whom he wills he hardens*, which means that he has mercy on whom he wills and does not have mercy on whom he does not will—may be believed with utter tenacity and firmness as pertaining to a kind of justice that is hidden from that which is sought and must be observed in our human affairs and earthly agreements. Unless we held fast there to certain clearly marked vestiges of eternal justice, our frail efforts would never aim at and long for the holiest and purest resting place and sanctuary of spiritual precepts. *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied* (Mt 5:6). In the aridity of our life and of this mortal condition, therefore, unless there were a sprinkling from on high of, so to speak, the slightest mist of justice, we would wither away more quickly than we thirst. Hence, since it is by giving and receiving that human society is bound together, while it is things either owed or not owed that are given and received, who would not see that no one—and certainly not he who would willingly forgive what is owed him—can be accused of injustice who exacts what is owed him, and that this [i.e., whether a debt should be exacted or not] falls under the judgment not of those who owe the debt but of the one to whom the debt is owed? This thought or vestige (as I said above) has been clearly marked upon the affairs of men from the highest summit of justice.

Therefore, all human beings—since, as the Apostle says, *all die in Adam* (1 Cor 15:22), from whom the origin of the offense against God spread throughout the whole human race—are a kind of single mass of sin owing a debt of punishment to the divine and loftiest justice, and whether [the punishment that is owed] be exacted or forgiven, there is no injustice. They are debtors, however, who proudly judge from whom it should be exacted and by whom it should be forgiven, like those who, having been brought to that vineyard, were unjustly angered when precisely as much was gifted to the others as was paid to them.⁴⁸ And so the Apostle beats back this impudent question in this way: *O man, who are you that you talk back to God?* (Rom 9:20) For he talks back to God when it displeases him that God complains of sinners, as if God would compel someone to sin, although he himself compels no one to sin but only does not bestow on certain sinners the mercy of being made righteous by him, and for that reason it is said that he hardens certain sinners because he does not have mercy on them, not because he forces them to sin. But to those to whom he is not merciful he judges, with a most secret justice that is far removed from human understanding, that mercy must not be shown. For *inscrutable are his judgments and unfathomable his ways* (Rom 11:33). Justly, however, does he complain of sinners as one who does not force them to sin. And likewise [he complains] so that those to whom he shows mercy may possess a call [to grace] as well. Thus, as God complains of sinners, their hearts may be pricked and they may turn to his grace. Justly and mercifully, then, does he complain.

2,17. But if it is disturbing that no one resists his will, because whom he wills he sustains and whom he wills he abandons, since both the one whom he sustains and the one whom he abandons come from the same mass of sinners and, although both owe a debt of punishment, yet it is exacted from one and forgiven another—if it is disturbing, *O man, who are you that you talk back to God?* For I think that the meaning of *man* is the same here as in the passage, *Are you not men and do you not walk as men do?* (1 Cor 3:3) For by this term they are designated as fleshly and animal persons, as when it is said to them, *I have not been able to speak to you as to spiritual persons but as to fleshly ones* (1 Cor 3:1); and, *You were not able, and you are still not able, for you are still fleshly* (1 Cor 3:2); and, *The animal man, however, does not grasp the things that are of God's Spirit* (1 Cor 2:14). To these, therefore, it is said, *O man, who are you that you talk back to God? Does what has been fashioned say to the one who fashioned it, Why did you make me thus? Or does the potter not indeed have the power to make from the same lump of clay one vessel for*

48. See Mt 20:1-12.

honor and another for reproach? (Rom 9:20-21) With those very words he seems to show with sufficient clarity that he is speaking to fleshly man, because the mire itself alludes to that from which the first man was formed.⁴⁹ And since, as I have already noted, according to the same Apostle, *all die in Adam*, he says that there is a single lump for all. And although one vessel is made for honor and another for reproach, nonetheless even the one that is made for honor has to begin in fleshly fashion and from there rise up to spiritual maturity, since they had already been made for honor and already been reborn in Christ. Yet, because he is addressing little children, he also refers to them as fleshly when he says, *I have not been able to speak to you as to spiritual persons but as to fleshly ones. Since you are little children in Christ, I have given you milk to drink, not solid food. For you were not able, and you are in fact still not able, for you are still fleshly.* (1 Cor 3:1-2) Although he says that they are fleshly, then, still they have already been born in Christ and are little children in him and must drink milk. And what he adds—you are in fact still not able—indicates that it will be possible for them to make progress because grace had already begun in them when they were spiritually reborn. These, therefore, were vessels made for honor, to whom it may still rightly be said, *O man, who are you that you talk back to God?* And if this is rightly said to such as them, it is much more rightly said to those who either have not yet been regenerated in this way or have even been made for reproach. Only it should be maintained with unflinching faith that there is no injustice with God, who either forgives or exacts what is owed him, and neither can the one from whom he rightfully exacts it complain of his injustice nor ought the other to whom it is forgiven boast of his own merits. For the one only repays what is owed while the other has only what he has received.

2,18. But at this point we must strive to see, with the Lord's assistance, how both these statements are true: *You hate nothing that you have made and I loved Jacob but I hated Esau.* For if he hated Esau because he was a vessel made for reproach, and it was the same potter who made one vessel for honor and another for reproach, how is it that *you hate nothing that you have made?* For obviously he hates Esau, because he made him a vessel for reproach. This problem is solved if we understand that God is the maker of all creatures. But every creature of God is good,⁵⁰ and every human being, insofar as he is a human being and not insofar as he is a sinner, is a creature. God, therefore, is the creator of the human body and soul. Neither of these is evil and neither is hated by God, for he hates nothing that he has made. The soul, however, is

49. See Gn 2:7.

50. See 1 Tm 4:4.

more excellent than the body, but God, the author and creator of each, is more excellent than both soul and body, and he hates nothing in the human being other than sin. Sin, however, is a disorder and a perversion in the human being—that is, a turning away from the creator, who is more excellent, and a turning to created things, which are inferior.⁵¹ God, therefore, does not hate Esau the human being, but God does hate Esau the sinner, as is said of the Lord: *He came unto his own, and his own did not accept him* (Jn 1:11). To these he himself says, *You do not hear me because you are not of God* (Jn 8:47). How are they his own and how are they not of God if not because the one thing is said of human beings whom the Lord himself made while the other is said of sinners whom the Lord himself was rebuking? Yet the same persons are themselves both human beings and sinners—but human beings by God's doing and sinners by their own will.

As far as his loving Jacob is concerned: was he not a sinner? But he loved in him not the guilt that he did away with but the grace that he bestowed. For Christ also died for the wicked⁵²—yet not that they might remain wicked but that, having been made righteous, they might be changed from their wickedness and believe in him who makes the wicked righteous. For God hates wickedness. And so in some he punishes it by condemning them, while in others he removes it by making them righteous, just as he himself judges by his inscrutable judgments⁵³ must be done in their regard. And, because he makes vessels for reproach from the number of the wicked whom he does not make righteous, he does not hate in them the fact that he makes them, for they are accursed insofar as they are wicked, but insofar as they are made vessels they are made for a certain use, so that, by way of the punishments that have been decreed for them, the vessels that are made for honor may advance [in holiness]. And so God does not hate them insofar as they are human beings, nor insofar as they are vessels—that is, [he does not hate] what he does in them in creation nor what he does in them by his decree. For he hates nothing that he has made. Yet, in that he makes them vessels of perdition to use in correcting others, he hates the wickedness in them that he himself did not make. For as a judge hates theft in a person but does not hate the fact that he is sent to the mines⁵⁴—for a thief does the former and a judge the latter—neither does God hate what he makes because out of a lump of the wicked he makes vessels of perdition—that is, a work decreed by him for the punishment owed to those who are perishing, in

51. "A turning away . . . a turning to": *aversio . . . conversio*. This definition of sin is notable for its brevity and its breadth.

52. See Rom 5:6.

53. See Rom 11:33.

54. Laboring in the state-controlled mines was a standard form of criminal punishment.

which those on whom he has mercy discover their opportunity for salvation. Thus it was said to Pharaoh: *It was for this that I raised you up, so that I might display my power in you and so that my name might be made known throughout the earth*. This manifestation of God's power and the making known of his name throughout the earth are of benefit to those for whom such a calling is fitting so that they may be fearful and correct their ways. Accordingly he says as follows, *But if God, who is willing to display his wrath and to manifest his power, has borne with great patience the vessels of wrath that have been produced for perdition* (Rom 9:22). The implication is: *Who are you that you talk back to God?* When we join this text to the previous words, this is the meaning: If God, who is willing to display his wrath, has borne with the vessels of wrath, who are you that you talk back to God? He is willing, however, not only to display his wrath and to manifest his power, having borne with great patience the vessels of wrath that have been produced for perdition, but also, as in the words that follow, *to reveal the riches of his glory for the vessels of mercy* (Rom 9:23). For what profit is there to the vessels produced for perdition in God's patiently enduring them when, in accordance with his decree, he destroys and uses them as a means of salvation for those others on whom he has mercy? But it does indeed profit those for whose salvation he thus uses them, so that, as it is written, the righteous hand may wash in the blood of the sinner⁵⁵—that is, that it may be cleansed of evil works through the fear of God, when it sees the punishments of sinners. That he is willing to display his wrath and has borne with the vessels of wrath, therefore, contributes to a beneficial fear to which others must be exposed and to the making known of the riches of his glory to the vessels of mercy, *which he has prepared for glory* (Rom 9:23). And indeed that hardening of the wicked demonstrates two things—both what should be feared, so that through goodness a person may be converted to God, and what great thanks are owed to the mercy of God, who shows in the punishment of the ones what he forgives in the others. But if what he exacts of the ones is not a just punishment, then nothing is forgiven the others, from whom he does not exact it. But because it is just and there is no injustice with God when he punishes, who can give adequate thanks to him who remits what, if he willed to exact it, no one would rightly say he did not owe?

2,19. *Us whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the gentiles* (Rom 9:24)—that is, *the vessels of mercy which he has prepared for glory*. For those [who are called] are not all Jews, but they are *from* the Jews; nor are they absolutely all the peoples of the gentiles, but they are *from* the gentiles. For from Adam has come a single mass of sinners and wicked

55. See Ps 58:10.

persons; it is far from God's grace, and both Jews and gentiles belong to the one lump of it. For if from the same lump the potter makes one vessel for honor and another for reproach, and if it is obvious that from the Jews, as from the gentiles, some vessels are for honor and some are for reproach, it follows that they should all be understood to belong to one lump.

Then he begins to offer prophetic testimonies to individual cases in reverse chronological order. For he had spoken first of the Jews and afterwards of the gentiles, but [now] he submits testimony on behalf of the gentiles first and then on behalf of the Jews. Thus: *As Hosea says, I will call a people that was not mine, my people, and that was not loved, loved, and in the place where it was said, You are not my people, there they shall be called the children of the living God* (Rom 9:25-26). This is understood to have been said of the gentiles, because they did not have a single place designated for sacrifices as did the Jews in Jerusalem. But apostles were sent to the gentiles so that those to whom he gave the power to become children of God (Jn 1:12) would believe, each of them in their own place, and so that wherever they had come to faith they would also offer there a sacrifice of praise.⁵⁶

But Isaiah, he says, cries out for Israel (Rom 9:27). Lest, on the other hand, all the Israelites be believed to have fallen into perdition, he also teaches there that some vessels have been made for honor and others for reproach. If, he says, *the number of the children of Israel were like the sands of the sea, a remnant will be saved* (Rom 9:27). The remaining vessels, then, are the throng that has been produced for perdition. For the Lord, he says, *will carry out his brief and swift word upon the earth* (Rom 9:28)—that is, in order to save those who believe⁵⁷ through grace by the simplicity of their faith, not through the innumerable observances by which that multitude was burdened and oppressed as though they were slaves. Through grace he carried out his brief and swift word upon the earth for us when he said, *My yoke is easy, and my burden is light* (Mt 11:30). And shortly thereafter this is said: *The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart—that is, the word of faith that we preach. Because if you confess in your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you shall be saved. For with the heart there is belief unto righteousness, while with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.* (Rom 10:8-10) This is the brief and swift word that the Lord has carried out upon the earth. By its brevity and swiftness the thief was made righteous who, with all his members fastened to the cross but with these two [members] unhindered, believed with his heart unto righteousness and

56. See Ps 50:14.

57. See 1 Cor 1:21.

confessed with his mouth unto salvation, and immediately he deserved to hear:⁵⁸ *Today you shall be with me in paradise* (Lk 23:43). For his good works would have followed had he, upon receiving grace, lived for a long time among men. Yet they had not come in advance so as to merit the same grace by which he who was fastened to the cross as a thief was borne away from the cross to paradise.

And, he says, as Isaiah predicted, *Unless the Lord of hosts had left us offspring, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been like Gomorrah* (Rom 9:29). What he says here, *had left us offspring*, appears elsewhere as *a remnant will be saved*. But others who owed the debt of punishment perished as vessels of perdition. And the fact that not all would perish as at Sodom and Gomorrah was not due to anything that they had merited; it was rather the grace of God leaving a seed from which another harvest would spring throughout the whole earth. A little later he also says this: *And so, therefore, at this time as well a remnant exists that was chosen by grace. But if by grace, then not by works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. What then? What Israel was seeking it did not find. The chosen found it, however, while the rest were blinded.* (Rom 11:5-7) The vessels of mercy found it but the vessels of wrath were blinded; yet, like all the gentiles, they are from the same lump.

2.20. There is a certain passage of scripture that is very pertinent to the matter at hand, which provides marvelous proof of what has been explained. It is in the book that is called Jesus Sirach by some and Ecclesiasticus by others, and in it there is written as follows: *All human beings come from the ground, and from the earth Adam was created. In the abundance of discipline the Lord separated them and changed their ways. Some he blessed and exalted, and these he sanctified and brought to himself. Some he cursed and humbled and turned to dissension. Like clay in a potter's hand, for shaping and forming, all its ways according to his plan, so is man in the hands of the one who made him, the one who deals with him according to his judgment. In contrast to evil there is good, and opposed to death there is life, in the same way the sinner is opposed to the righteous man. Look thus upon the work of the Most High, in twos, one opposed to the other.* (Sir 33:10-15)

The first thing that is mentioned here is God's discipline. In the abundance of discipline, it says, *the Lord separated them*—from what if not from the blessedness of paradise?—and *changed their ways* (Sir 33:11), so that they would now live as mortals. Then a single mass was made of all of them, which came from the transmission of sin and the punishment of mortality, although, thanks to God's forming and creating them, they are good. For in all people

58. See Lk 23:32-43.

there is a beauty and cohesion of body with such harmony among its members that the Apostle used this to illustrate how charity should be maintained;⁵⁹ in all people there is also a vital spirit that gives life to their earthly members; and the whole nature of the human person is regulated in marvelous fashion by the mastery of the soul and the servitude of the body. But the fleshly desire that results from the punishment for sin has, because of the original guilt, cast abiding confusion into everything, and now it presides over the whole human race as one complete lump. But there also follows: *Some he blessed and exalted, and them he sanctified and brought to himself. Some he cursed and humbled and turned to dissension.* (Sir 33:12)

As the Apostle says, *Or does the potter not have the power to make from the same lump of clay one vessel for honor and another for reproach?* (Rom 9:21) And so the passage that has been cited uses the same imagery: *Like clay in a potter's hand, it says, for shaping and forming, all its ways according to his plan, so is man in the hands of the one who made him* (Sir 33:13-14). But the Apostle says, *Is there injustice with God?* Notice, therefore, what is added here: *He deals with him according to his judgment* (Sir 33:14). But although just punishments are assigned to those who have been condemned, yet, because this very thing is turned to the advantage of those to whom mercy is shown so that they may advance [in holiness], pay attention to what remains: *In contrast to evil there is good, and opposed to death there is life; in the same way the sinner is opposed to the righteous man. Look thus upon all the work of the Most High, in twos, one opposed to the other.* (Sir 33:15) Thus, from the conjunction of two bad things, better things emerge and advance [in holiness]. Yet, because they are better through grace, it is as though [the writer] were saying, *A remnant will be saved.* Speaking in the person of that remnant, he goes on to say, *And I have been the last to keep watch, like someone who gleans after the vintagers* (Sir 33:16). And where is the proof that this is not the result of merits but of God's mercy? *In the blessing of the Lord, he says, I myself have hoped, and like one who gathers the vintage I have filled the winepress* (Sir 33:17). For although he was the last to keep watch, nevertheless, because, as is said, the last shall be first,⁶⁰ the people of Israel, which has been gleaned from the rest⁶¹ and which hopes in the Lord, has filled its winepress from out of the abundance of the vintage, which has flourished throughout the world.

2,21. The main thought of the Apostle, then, as well as of those who have been made righteous, through whom an understanding of grace has been given to us, is none other than that whoever boasts should boast in the

59. See 1 Cor 12:12-27.

60. See Mt 20:16.

61. See Jer 6:9.

Lord.⁶² For would anyone question the works of the Lord, who from the same lump condemns one person and makes another righteous? The free choice of the will counts for a great deal, to be sure. But what does it count for in those who have been sold under sin?⁶³ *The flesh*, [the Apostle] says, *lusts against the spirit, the spirit against the flesh, so that you do not do the things that you want* (Gal 5:17). It is commanded that we live uprightly, and in fact this reward has been offered—that we merit to live blessedly forever. But who can live uprightly and do good works without having been made righteous by faith?⁶⁴ It is commanded that we believe so that, having received the gift of the Holy Spirit through love, we may be able to do good works. But who can believe without being touched by some call—that is, by the evidence of things? Who has it in his power for his mind to be touched by such a manifestation as would move his will to faith? Who embraces in his heart something that does not attract him? Who has it in his power either to come into contact with what can attract him or to be attracted once he has come into contact? When, therefore, things attract us whereby we may advance towards God, this is inspired and furnished by the grace of God; it is not obtained by our own assent and effort or by the merits of our works because, whether it be the assent of our will or our intense effort or our works aglow with charity, it is he who gives, he who bestows it. We are ordered to ask so that we may receive, and to seek so that we may find, and to knock so that it may be opened to us.⁶⁵ Is not this particular prayer of ours sometimes so lukewarm, or rather cold and practically non-existent, indeed, sometimes so utterly non-existent, that we do not notice this in ourselves without sorrow? Because if this actually makes us sorry, we are already praying. What else, then, is being shown to us than that it is he who orders us to ask and seek and knock who enables us to do these things? *It is not a matter of willing or of running, therefore, but of a merciful God*, since in fact we could neither will nor run if he did not move and rouse us.

2,22. If there is some choice that is made here, such as we understand from the words, *A remnant that was chosen by grace* (Rom 11:5), the choice is not of those who, for the sake of eternal life, have been made righteous. It is, rather, that those are chosen who are to be made righteous,

62. See 2 Cor 10:17.

63. See Rom 7:14.

64. See Rom 5:1.

65. See Mt 7:7.

and this choice is so very hidden that it can by no means be discerned by us who are in the same lump. Or, if it is discernible to some, I for my part acknowledge my incompetence in the matter. For, if in my thoughts I am allowed some insight into this choice, I cannot see how persons are chosen for the grace of salvation apart from either greater endowments or lesser sins or both. We may also add, if you wish, learning that is good and useful. Whoever, then, has been ensnared in and sullied by only the very least sins—for who could be without *any*?—and is endowed with intelligence and has been refined by the liberal arts seems as if he must have been chosen for grace. But when I arrive at this conclusion, he who has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the strong, and the foolish things of the world to confound the wise,⁶⁶ laughs at me in such a way that, as I gaze upon him and am checked by shame, I myself begin to make fun of many who are more chaste than certain sinners and better speech-makers than certain fishermen.⁶⁷ Do we not notice that many of us who are faithful and who walk in God's way by no means possess endowments comparable not only, I would say, to those of some heretics but even to those of actors? On the other hand, do we not see some persons of both sexes living peacefully in married chastity, who are nonetheless heretics or pagans or even members of the true faith and the true Church and who are so lukewarm that we marvel at how they are surpassed not only by the patience and temperance but even by the faith, hope and charity of prostitutes and actors who have experienced sudden conversions?

The upshot, then, is that wills are chosen. But the will itself, unless it comes into contact with something that attracts and beckons the soul, can by no means be moved. But that it may come into contact with this is not in a person's power. What did Saul want to do but attack, seize, enchain and kill Christians? What a rabid, raging, blind will!⁶⁸ Yet at a single voice from heaven he fell prostrate and, having had such an experience that his mind and will, broken by savagery, were turned about and directed toward

66. See 1 Cor 1:27.

67. These lines bear a remarkable resemblance to a scene recounted in *Confessions* VIII, 11, 27, in which Continece, appearing to Augustine in a kind of vision and bringing before his mind's eye a throng of the chaste of every condition (analogous to the many who are weak and foolish in the view of the world), mocks him because he fears that he cannot be chaste himself, whereupon he blushes. The present work and the *Confessions* were written at most within a year or two of each other.

68. See Acts 8:3; 9:1-2.

faith, he was at once transformed from a famous persecutor of the gospel to its still more famous preacher.⁶⁹

And yet *what shall we say? Is there injustice with God*, who exacts from whom he pleases and gives to whom he pleases but who never exacts what is not owed him and never gives what is not his? *Is there injustice with God? Of course not!* Yet why is one person treated one way and another person another way? *O man, who are you?* If you do not repay what is owed, you have reason to be grateful; if you do repay it, you have no reason to complain. Let us only believe, even if we cannot understand, that he who made and established the whole of creation, spiritual and corporeal, arranges everything according to number and weight and measure.⁷⁰ But *inscrutable are his judgments and unfathomable his ways* (Rom 11:33). Let us say "Alleluia" and join in the canticle, and let us not say "Why this?" or "Why that?" For all things have been created in their own time.⁷¹

69. See Acts 9:3-22.

70. See Wis 11:20.

71. See Sir 39:21. This and the preceding allusion to Wis 11:20, which is one of Augustine's favorite verses, is intended to hint at the order that governs creation, even though it may not always be immediately apparent.