Confessions

AUGUSTINE

AD 354–430

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Translated from the Latin with AI (Claude) and edited



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INTRODUCTION

Augustine of Hippo wrote the *Confessions* around AD 397–400, in his forties, newly a bishop in North Africa. It is the first great autobiography in Western literature, and it is written as a long prayer: from its first line to its last, Augustine is speaking to God.

The first nine books tell the story of his life: a restless childhood, the theft of some pears, student years in Carthage, nine years among the Manichees, a career as a teacher of rhetoric in Rome and Milan, and a conversion in a Milan garden when he heard a child's voice saying "Take it and read." The last four turn to memory, time and the creation of the world, and contain some of the most searching philosophy he wrote.

Each of the thirteen books is on its own page.

Book I

Infancy and boyhood
Augustine praises God and recalls his infancy, schooling and boyhood sins.

1.1.1 "You are great, Lord, and greatly to be praised: great is your power, and of your wisdom there is no measure." And a human being wants to praise you, some small part of your creation—a human being who carries his mortality around with him, carries around the evidence of his sin and the evidence that you "resist the proud." And yet a human being, some small part of your creation, wants to praise you. You stir us so that praising you is a delight, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you. Grant me, Lord, to know and understand whether we should first call upon you or praise you, and whether we must first know you or call upon you. But who calls upon you without knowing you? For someone who does not know you may call upon something else in your place. Or rather, are you called upon so that you may be known? Yet "how will they call upon one in whom they have not believed? And how will they believe without someone to preach?"[1] And "those who seek the Lord will praise him." For those who seek him find him, and those who find him will praise him. Let me seek you, Lord, by calling upon you, and let me call upon you by believing in you: for you have been preached to us. My faith calls upon you, Lord—the faith you gave me, which you

1 Psalm 145:3; 147:5. "You resist the proud": James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5. The closing questions: Romans 10:14.

breathed into me through the humanity of your Son, through the ministry of your preacher.[2]

1.2.2 And how shall I call upon my God, my God and Lord, since surely when I call upon him I am calling him into myself? And what place is there in me where my God could come into me—where God could come into me, the God who "made heaven and earth"? Is it really so, Lord my God? Is there anything in me that can contain you? Or do even heaven and earth, which you made and in which you made me, contain you? Or, since without you nothing that exists would exist, does it follow that whatever exists contains you? Since, then, I too exist, why do I ask you to come into me, when I would not exist unless you were in me? For I am not yet in the underworld—and yet you are there too, for "if I go down into the underworld, you are there."[3] So I would not exist, my God, I would not exist at all, unless you were in me. Or rather, I would not exist unless I were in you, "from whom are all things, through whom are all things, in whom are all things." Even so, Lord, even so. Where do I call you to, since I am in you? Or from where would you come into me? For where could I withdraw beyond heaven and earth, so that my God could come from there into me—he who said, "I fill heaven and earth"?[4]

1.3.3 Do heaven and earth, then, contain you, since you fill them? Or do you fill them and something of you is left over, since they do not contain you? And where do you pour whatever of you remains once heaven and earth are filled? Or do you have no need to be contained anywhere, you who contain all things, since what you fill you fill by containing it? For the vessels that are full of you do not hold you steady, since even if they break you are not spilled. And when you are poured out upon us, you do not lie spilled on the ground; you raise us up. You are not scattered; you gather us together. But all the things you fill, you fill with the whole of yourself. Or, since all things cannot con-

2 Psalm 22:26.
3 Genesis 1:1; Psalm 139:8.
4 Romans 11:36; Jeremiah 23:24.

tain the whole of you, do they contain a part of you, and do all things contain the same part at once? Or does each thing contain its own part—larger things larger parts, smaller things smaller ones? Is some part of you, then, larger and some part smaller? Or are you everywhere whole, and does nothing contain the whole of you?

1.4.4 What, then, is my God? What, I ask, but the Lord God? "For who is Lord but the Lord? Or who is God but our God?" Highest, best, most powerful, most all-powerful, most merciful and most just, most hidden and most present, most beautiful and most strong, steadfast and beyond grasp, unchanging yet changing all things, never new, never old, making all things new and bringing the proud into decay though they do not know it; always active, always at rest, gathering in yet needing nothing, bearing and filling and protecting, creating and nourishing and perfecting, seeking though you lack nothing. You love, but without burning; you are jealous, yet untroubled; you repent, but without grief; you are angry, yet calm; you change your works but not your plan; you take back what you find, though you never lost it. Never in need, you still rejoice in gains; never greedy, you still demand interest. More than is due is paid to you, so that you become the debtor—and who has anything that is not yours?[5] You pay debts though you owe no one; you cancel debts and lose nothing. And what have we said, my God, my life, my holy sweetness? Or what does anyone say when he speaks of you? And yet woe to those who are silent about you, since even the talkative are mute.

1.5.5 Who will grant me to rest in you? Who will grant me that you come into my heart and make it drunk, so that I forget my evils and embrace my one good—you? What are you to me? Have mercy, so that I may speak. What am I myself to you, that you command me to love you, and if I do not, you are angry with me and threaten me with enormous miseries? Is it a small misery in itself if I do not love you? Ah, me! Tell me, by your mercies, Lord my God, what you are to me. "Say to my soul, 'I am your salva-

5 Psalm 18:31.

tion.'" Say it so that I may hear. See, the ears of my heart are before you, Lord. Open them and say to my soul, "I am your salvation." I will run after that voice and take hold of you. "Do not hide your face from me." Let me die, so that I may not die—so that I may see it.[6]

1.5.6 The house of my soul is too narrow for you to come into it: let it be enlarged by you. It is in ruins: rebuild it. It has things in it that offend your eyes: I confess it, and I know it. But who will cleanse it? Or to whom but you shall I cry, "Cleanse me from my hidden faults, Lord, and spare your servant from the faults of others"? "I believe, and so I speak," Lord: you know. Have I not "declared my transgressions" to you "against myself," my God, "and you forgave the wickedness of my heart"? I do not go to court with you, who are the truth; and I do not want to deceive myself, "so that my wickedness may not lie to itself." So I do not go to court with you, because "if you mark iniquities, Lord, Lord, who will stand?"[7]

INFANCY

Augustine reflects on his infancy, known only from others, and asks whether even babies sin.

1.6.7 Yet let me speak before your mercy—let me, who am dust and ashes, speak all the same. For see, it is your mercy I am speaking to, not some man who would mock me. Perhaps you too mock me; but you will turn and have mercy on me. For what is it I want to say, Lord, except that I do not know where I came from into this—shall I call it a dying life, or a living death? I do not know. And the comforts of your mercies took me up, as I have heard from the parents of my flesh, from whom and in whom you formed me in time—for I do not remember. So the comforts of human milk received me; yet neither my mother nor my nurses filled their own breasts, but you, through them, gave me the food of infancy, according to your ordinance and the riches

6 Psalm 35:3; Psalm 27:9.
7 Psalm 19:12–13; 116:10; 32:5; 27:12 (Latin version); 130:3.

you have laid out down to the very foundation of things. You also gave me not to want more than you gave, and gave those who nursed me the will to give me what you gave them: for with a rightly ordered affection they wanted to give me what they had in abundance from you. For the good that came to me from them was good for them—though it came not from them but through them. From you, God, come all good things, and from my God comes all my salvation. This I realized only later, as you cried out to me through the very things you bestow, within and without. For at that time I knew how to suck, and to be content with what pleased me, and to cry at what hurt my flesh—nothing more.

1.6.8 Later I began to smile as well, first in my sleep, then awake. This was told me about myself, and I believed it, since we see other infants do the same; for I do not remember these things of mine. And see, little by little I began to sense where I was, and I wanted to show my wishes to those who could fulfill them, and I could not, because my wishes were inside and they were outside, and they had no sense by which they could enter into my soul. So I would throw my limbs about and make noises —signs resembling my wishes, the few I could, as best I could; for they did not really resemble them. And when I was not obeyed—either because I was not understood, or so that I would come to no harm—I was indignant that my elders did not submit to me and that free people did not wait on me as slaves, and I took my revenge on them by crying. That infants are like this I have learned from those I have been able to observe; and that I was like this myself, they have shown me, without knowing it, better than my nurses who did know.

1.6.9 And see, my infancy died long ago, and I am alive. But you, Lord, who live forever and in whom nothing dies—for before the beginnings of the ages, and before anything that can even be called "before," you are; and you are God and Lord of all that you have created; and with you stand the causes of all unstable things, and the unchangeable origins of all changeable things abide, and the eternal reasons of all things without

reason and bound by time live on—tell me, your suppliant, God; merciful one, tell me, your miserable one: did my infancy follow some earlier age of mine that had already died? Or was that the time I spent within my mother's womb? For about that, too, something has been told me, and I have myself seen pregnant women. And what was before that, my sweetness, my God? Was I anywhere, or anyone? For I have no one who can tell me this: neither father nor mother could, nor the experience of others, nor my own memory. Or do you laugh at me for asking these things, and bid me praise you and confess to you for what I do know?

1.6.10 I confess to you, Lord of heaven and earth, and give you praise for my beginnings and my infancy, which I do not remember. And you have granted human beings to infer much about themselves from others, and to believe much about themselves on the authority even of ordinary women. For I existed and lived even then, and already, at the end of infancy, I was looking for signs by which to make my feelings known to others. Where could such a living creature come from, if not from you, Lord? Will anyone be the craftsman of his own making? Or is there some channel drawn from elsewhere through which being and life flow into us, other than your making us, Lord—you for whom being and living are not two different things, because to be supremely and to live supremely are one and the same? For you are supreme, and you do not change, and today does not come to its end in you—and yet it does come to its end in you, because all these things too are in you: they would have no paths to pass along unless you held them. And since "your years do not fail," your years are a single today. How many of our days, and of our fathers' days, have already passed through your today, and received from it their measure and whatever existence they had; and still others will pass through it, and receive, and exist in whatever way they will. "But you are the same": all that is tomorrow and beyond, and all that is yesterday and before, you will make today, you have made today. What is it to me if someone does not understand this? Let him rejoice too,

and say, "What is this?" Let him rejoice even so, and let him love to find you by not finding, rather than by finding to fail to find you.[8]

1.7.11 Hear me, God. Woe to the sins of humankind! And it is a human being who says this, and you have mercy on him, because you made him, but you did not make the sin in him. Who reminds me of the sin of my infancy? For no one is clean of sin before you, not even an infant whose life on earth is a single day. Who reminds me? Any tiny little one now, in whom I see what I do not remember about myself? What, then, was my sin at that time? That I gaped for the breast, wailing? For if I did that now—gaping, not for the breast of course, but for the food suited to my years—I would be laughed at and rebuked, quite rightly. So I was doing things then that deserved rebuke; but since I could not understand anyone rebuking me, neither custom nor reason allowed me to be rebuked. For as we grow up we root these things out and throw them away; and I have never seen anyone who knows what he is doing throw out what is good when he clears something out.[9] Or were even these things good for that stage of life: to beg with tears even for what would do harm if given; to rage fiercely at people not subject to him—free people and elders, even those who gave him birth, and many others wiser than he who did not obey his every whim—and to strive to hurt them, hitting out as hard as he can, because they do not obey orders it would be ruinous to obey? So it is the weakness of an infant's limbs that is innocent, not the infant's mind. I myself have seen and observed a jealous little one: he could not talk yet, and he stared, pale, with a bitter look at the child nursing beside him. Who does not know this? Mothers and nurses say they charm such things away with who knows what remedies. Unless this too is innocence: when the fountain of milk flows richly and abundantly, not to tolerate a partner in it who is in desperate need and still lives on that one food alone. But these things are indulgently put up with, not because they are

8 Psalm 102:27.
9 Echoing Job 14:4–5 (Greek and Latin versions).

nothing or slight, but because they will pass away as the years go by. You can prove this from the fact that the very same things cannot be calmly tolerated when they are found in someone older.

1.7.12 You, then, Lord my God, who gave the infant life and a body—a body which, as we see, you furnished with senses, fitted together with limbs, graced with a shape, and in which, for its wholeness and safety, you implanted all the drives of a living creature—you command me to praise you for these things, and to confess to you, and to "sing to your name, Most High"; for you are God, almighty and good, even if you had made only these things, which no one else can make but you, the One, from whom comes all measure; most beautiful, who give form to all things and order all things by your law. This age of mine, then, Lord, which I do not remember living, about which I have trusted others, and which I have inferred from other infants that I passed through—though that inference is quite reliable—I am reluctant to count as part of this life of mine that I live in this world.[10] For as far as the darkness of my forgetting goes, it is on a par with the life I lived in my mother's womb. And if "I was conceived in iniquity, and in sins my mother nourished me in the womb," where, I beg you, my God, where, Lord, was I, your servant—where or when was I innocent? But see, I pass over that time: what have I to do with it now, when I can recall no trace of it?[11]

LEARNING TO SPEAK

Augustine recalls how he learned to speak by watching his elders and linking words to things.

1.8.13 Did I not, moving on from infancy, come into boyhood? Or rather, did boyhood come into me and take the place of infancy? Yet infancy did not depart—for where did it go? And yet it was no longer there. For I was no longer an infant, one who could not

10 Psalm 92:1.
11 Psalm 51:5.

speak, but already a boy who talked. This I remember; and how I had learned to speak I realized later. For it was not that my elders taught me, supplying me with words in some fixed order of instruction, as they did my letters a little later. Rather, I myself, with the mind you gave me, my God—when I wanted to express the feelings of my heart with cries and various sounds and various movements of my limbs, so that my will would be obeyed, and could not express everything I wanted to everyone I wanted—I weighed things in my memory.[12] When people named some object, and as they said the word moved their body toward something, I saw and retained that the object was called by the sound they uttered when they wanted to point it out. That they meant this was clear from the movement of their body—the natural language, as it were, of all peoples, made up of the face, the glance of the eyes, the action of the other limbs, and the tone of voice that shows the mind's feelings in seeking, having, rejecting or avoiding things. So, little by little, I gathered what things the words stood for, as I heard them often, set in their proper places in various sentences; and once my mouth had been trained to these signs, I began to express my own wishes through them. In this way I shared with those around me the signs for expressing our wishes, and I entered more deeply into the stormy society of human life, still dependent on the authority of my parents and the bidding of my elders.

SCHOOL AND BEATINGS

Augustine describes being beaten at school for idleness and praying to God to escape the beatings.

1.9.14 God, my God, what miseries I experienced there, and how I was made a fool of! For it was set before me as a boy, as the right way to live, that I should obey those who urged me on, so that I might flourish in this world and excel in the arts of the tongue that serve human honor and false riches. Then I was sent to school to learn my letters, and I did not know, poor wretch, what

12 The Latin infans literally means "not speaking."

use they were. And yet if I was slow at learning, I was beaten. For our elders approved of this, and many who had lived this life before us had laid down the painful roads we were forced to travel, with labor and sorrow multiplied for the sons of Adam. But we found, Lord, people who prayed to you, and from them we learned to think of you, as best we could, as someone great who could hear us and come to our aid even without appearing to our senses. For as a boy I began to pray to you, my help and my refuge, and in calling on you I broke the knots of my tongue; and I prayed to you, small as I was, with no small feeling, that I might not be beaten at school. And when you did not hear me—which was not to count as folly in me—my beatings, then a great and heavy evil for me, were laughed at by grown-ups, even by my own parents, who wanted no harm to come to me.

1.9.15 Is there anyone, Lord, of so great a soul, clinging to you with so mighty a love—is there anyone, I say (for a certain dullness can also produce this; so there is such a person)—who, clinging to you in devotion, is so greatly moved that he can make as light of the rack and the iron claws and all kinds of such tortures (to escape which people all over the world beg you in great fear), while loving those who dread them most bitterly, as our parents laughed at the torments we boys suffered from our teachers? For we did not fear them any less, nor pray to you any less to escape them; and yet we sinned by writing or reading or thinking about our lessons less than was required of us. For we did not lack memory or intelligence, Lord, which you willed us to have in sufficient measure for our age; but we loved to play, and we were punished for it by people who were certainly doing the same sort of thing. But the trifles of grown-ups are called business, while when boys have the same kind of trifles, they are punished by grown-ups; and no one pities the boys, or the grown-ups, or both. Unless perhaps some good judge of things approves of my being beaten because as a boy I played ball, and that game kept me from learning my letters quickly—letters with which, as a grown man, I would play a more shameful game. Or was the very man who beat me doing anything differ-

ent? If he was defeated by a fellow teacher in some petty dispute, he was more racked with rage and envy than I was when a playmate outplayed me at ball.

1.10.16 And yet I sinned, Lord God, orderer and creator of all things in nature, but of sins only the orderer—Lord my God, I sinned by acting against the commands of my parents and of those teachers. For I could later make good use of the letters they wanted me to learn, whatever their motives. I was disobedient not because I chose better things, but from love of play: I loved proud victories in contests, and loved having my ears tickled by false stories so that they itched all the more hotly, while the same curiosity flashed more and more through my eyes toward the shows, the games of grown-ups. Yet those who put on these games enjoy such prestige that almost everyone wishes it for their little ones—whom they nonetheless gladly allow to be beaten if such shows keep them from the studies by which they hope they will one day come to put on such shows themselves. Look on these things, Lord, with mercy, and free us who already call upon you; free also those who do not yet call upon you, so that they may call upon you and you may free them.

1.11.17 For I had heard, while still a boy, of the eternal life promised to us through the humility of the Lord our God, who came down to our pride; and I was already being signed with the sign of his cross and seasoned with his salt from the time I left the womb of my mother, who greatly hoped in you. You saw, Lord, when I was still a boy and one day was suddenly burning with fever from a stomach complaint and close to death—you saw, my God, since you were already my guardian, with what surge of feeling and with what faith I begged for the baptism of your Christ, my God and Lord, from the devotion of my mother and of the mother of us all, your Church. And the mother of my flesh was deeply troubled, since with a chaste heart, in your faith, she was in labor still more lovingly with my eternal salvation; and she would already have hurried to have me initiated into the saving sacraments and washed clean, confessing you, Lord

Jesus, for the forgiveness of sins—had I not suddenly recovered.[13] So my cleansing was postponed, as if I must inevitably be soiled again if I lived, since, of course, after that washing the guilt of falling into the filth of sin would be greater and more dangerous. So I already believed, as did she and the whole household, except my father alone; yet he did not overcome the claim of my mother's devotion over me and keep me from believing in Christ, as he himself had not yet believed. For she was eager that you, my God, should be my father rather than he; and in this you helped her to prevail over her husband, whom she, the better of the two, served—for in this too she was serving you, who command it.[14]

1.11.18 I ask you, my God—I would like to know, if you too would like it—for what purpose my baptism was put off at that time: was it for my good that the reins on sinning were, so to speak, loosened for me? Or were they not loosened? Why, then, even now do we hear on all sides, about this person and that, "Leave him alone, let him do it: he isn't baptized yet"? And yet where the body's health is concerned we do not say, "Let him be wounded some more: he isn't healed yet." How much better, then, if I had been healed at once, and if the care of my family and my own had seen to it that the health of my soul, once received, was kept safe in your keeping, since you had given it. Much better indeed. But how many great waves of temptation seemed to loom after boyhood—my mother already knew of them, and she preferred to expose to them the clay from which I would later be formed, rather than the image already fashioned.

1.12.19 Yet in boyhood itself, when there was less to fear for me than in adolescence, I did not love my lessons, and I hated being pushed into them; and yet I was pushed, and good was done to me. I myself did not do good (for I would not have learned unless I was forced, and no one does good against his will, even if what he does is good); nor did those who pushed me do good; but good was done to me by you, my God. For they did not con-

13 Salt was placed on the tongue of catechumens, those preparing for baptism.
14 Augustine's father, Patricius, became a Christian only late in life.

sider to what end I would put what they forced me to learn, except to satisfy the insatiable cravings of a wealthy poverty and a shameful glory. But you, by whom "the hairs of our head are numbered," used the error of all who pressed me to learn for my benefit, and my own error, in not wanting to learn, you used for my punishment—a punishment I well deserved, so small a boy and so great a sinner.[15] So through those who did not do good you did good to me, and through my own sin you justly repaid me. For you have commanded it, and so it is: every disordered mind is its own punishment.

WEEPING FOR DIDO

Augustine explains why he hated Greek yet wept over Dido while neglecting his own soul.

1.13.20 But what was the reason why I hated Greek, in which I was being schooled as a small boy? Even now I have not fully worked it out. For I had come to love Latin literature—not what the first teachers teach, but what is taught by those called grammarians. Those first lessons, where one learns to read and write and count, I found no less burdensome and painful than all of Greek. Yet where did this come from, too, if not from sin and the vanity of life, by which I was "flesh, and a breath that goes on its way and does not return"?[16] For surely those first lessons were better, because more reliable—through them I gained, and still possess, the ability to read anything I find written and to write anything I want—better than those in which I was forced to memorize the wanderings of some Aeneas or other, while forgetting my own wanderings, and to weep for Dido dead because she killed herself for love, while all the time, amid these things, I bore my own dying away from you, God, my life, with dry eyes, most miserable wretch that I was.[17]

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15 Matthew 10:30.

16 Grammarians taught literature, the second stage of Roman schooling. Psalm 78:39.

17 In Virgil's Aeneid the Trojan hero Aeneas abandons Dido, queen of Carthage, who then kills herself. Latin errores means both "wanderings" and "errors."

1.13.21 For what is more miserable than a miserable wretch who does not pity himself, who weeps for the death of Dido, which came from loving Aeneas, but does not weep for his own death, which came from not loving you, God, light of my heart, bread for the inner mouth of my soul, power that is wedded to my mind and the inmost recesses of my thought? I did not love you, and I was unfaithful to you, and as I was unfaithful I heard all around me, "Well done! Well done!" For friendship with this world is unfaithfulness to you, and "Well done! Well done!" is said so that a man is ashamed if he is not like that. And for these things I did not weep, and I wept for Dido, "dead, having sought her end by the sword," while I myself was seeking the lowest ends of your creation, having abandoned you—earth going into earth. And if I were forbidden to read these things, I would grieve, because I could not read what made me grieve. Such is the madness by which this kind of literature is thought more respectable and richer than the lessons in which I learned to read and write.[18]

1.13.22 But now let my God cry out in my soul, and let your truth say to me, "It is not so, it is not so." That earlier teaching is certainly better. For see, I am readier to forget the wanderings of Aeneas and everything of that kind than how to write and read. True, curtains hang at the doors of the grammar schools; but they signify not so much the honor of a mystery as the covering-up of error. Let those whom I no longer fear not cry out against me, while I confess to you what my soul desires, my God, and find rest in condemning my evil ways, so that I may love your good ways. Let the sellers and buyers of grammar not cry out against me; for if I put it to them and ask whether it is true that Aeneas once came to Carthage, as the poet says, the less educated will answer that they do not know, and the more educated will even deny that it is true. But if I ask with what letters the name Aeneas is written, everyone who has learned these things will give me the right answer, according to the agreement and convention by which people have fixed these signs among them-

18 "Well done": Psalm 40:15. The line on Dido echoes Virgil, Aeneid 6.457.

selves. Likewise, if I ask which of these one would forget to the greater harm of one's life—reading and writing, or those poetic fictions—who does not see what anyone will answer who has not utterly forgotten himself? So I sinned as a boy when I preferred those empty things to these more useful ones in my affection—or rather, I hated these and loved those. Indeed, "one and one make two, two and two make four" was a hateful singsong to me; and the sweetest show of vanity was the wooden horse full of armed men, and Troy on fire, and "the ghost of Creusa herself."[19]

1.14.23 Why, then, did I hate Greek literature too, which sings of such things? For Homer too is skilled at weaving such tales and is most sweetly vain; yet to me as a boy he was bitter. I believe Virgil is the same to Greek boys when they are forced to learn him as I was forced to learn Homer. It was the difficulty, clearly—the sheer difficulty of mastering a foreign language—that sprinkled gall, as it were, over all the sweetness of the Greek tales. For I knew none of those words, and I was pressed hard, with savage threats and punishments, to learn them. There was a time, of course, when as an infant I knew no Latin words either; and yet I learned them just by paying attention, without any fear or torment, amid the coaxing of nurses, the jokes of people smiling at me, and the merriment of people playing with me. I learned them without the painful burden of anyone pressing me, since my own heart pressed me to bring forth what it had conceived—which it could not have done unless I had learned some words, not from people teaching me but from people talking, into whose ears I in turn brought forth whatever I felt. From this it is clear enough that free curiosity has greater power to make us learn these things than fearful compulsion. Yet compulsion checks the free flow of curiosity by your laws, God—your laws, from the schoolmasters' canes to the trials of the martyrs; for your laws have power to mix in wholesome bitterness that calls us back to you from the deadly pleasure by which we drew away from you.

19 Virgil, Aeneid 2.772: Creusa, Aeneas' wife, was lost in the fall of Troy.

1.15.24 "Hear my prayer, Lord," so that my soul may not faint under your discipline, nor I faint in confessing to you your mercies, by which you rescued me from all my worst ways, so that you might grow sweeter to me than all the seductions I used to follow, and I might love you with all my strength, and clasp your hand with my whole heart, and you might rescue me from every temptation to the very end. For see, Lord, my king and my God: let whatever useful thing I learned as a boy serve you; let what I speak and write and read and count serve you; for when I was learning empty things, you were giving me discipline, and you forgave me the sins of my delight in those empty things. For in them I learned many useful words; but these can also be learned in things that are not empty, and that is the safe road for children to walk.[20]

THE RIVER OF CUSTOM

Augustine condemns a schooling in immoral myths and recalls his boyhood thefts and cheating at games.

1.16.25 But woe to you, river of human custom! Who will stand against you? How long before you dry up? How long will you roll the children of Eve into that great and fearful sea which even those who have climbed aboard the wood can barely cross? Did I not read in you of Jupiter both thundering and committing adultery? Of course he could not do both; but it was so presented that real adultery would have authority for imitation, with false thunder acting as go-between. And which of the gowned schoolmasters listens with a sober ear to a man made of their own dust crying out and saying, "Homer invented these things and transferred human traits to the gods; I would rather he had transferred divine ones to us"? But it is truer to say that he did invent these things, but by attributing divine qualities to wicked men, so that crimes would not be thought crimes, and whoever com-

20 Psalm 61:1.

mitted them would seem to be imitating not depraved men but the gods of heaven.[21]

1.16.26 And yet, you river of hell, the children of men are thrown into you, with fees paid, to learn these things; and it is a great affair when this is done publicly in the forum, in full view of laws that decree salaries on top of the fees; and you pound your rocks and roar, saying, "This is where words are learned, this is where eloquence is acquired—so necessary for persuading people and setting out one's views." So we would not know these words—"shower of gold" and "lap" and "trick" and "temples of heaven" and the other words written in that passage—unless Terence brought on stage a worthless young man who sets up Jupiter as his model for debauchery, while he looks at a painting on a wall showing this scene: how Jupiter, they say, once sent a shower of gold into Danaë's lap, playing a trick on a woman? And see how he stirs himself up to lust, as if taught by heaven: "But what a god![22] he says—"who shakes the temples of heaven with his mighty thunder! And I, a mere little man, shouldn't do the same? I did it indeed, and gladly." These words are not in the least learned more easily through this indecency; rather, through these words the indecency is committed more boldly. I do not blame the words, which are like choice and precious vessels, but the wine of error that was poured out for us in them by drunken teachers; and if we did not drink, we were beaten, and we were not allowed to appeal to any sober judge. And yet, my God, in whose sight my remembering is now free from care, I learned these things gladly, and, wretch that I was, I delighted in them, and for this I was called a boy of great promise.

1.17.27 Allow me, my God, to say something also about my talent, your gift, and the nonsense on which I wore it down. For a task was set me—one that troubled my soul greatly, with the

21 "The wood" is the cross, pictured as a ship. The quotation is from Cicero, Tusculan Disputations 1.65.

22 Terence, The Eunuch 583–591. In myth Jupiter came to Danaë as a shower of gold.

prize of praise and the fear of disgrace or a beating—to speak the words of Juno, angry and grieving that she could not "turn the king of the Trojans away from Italy," words I had never heard Juno say. But we were forced to follow, wandering, in the footsteps of poetic fictions, and to say in prose something like what the poet had said in verse. And the one who spoke most admirably was the one in whom, in keeping with the dignity of the character portrayed, the feeling of anger and grief stood out most lifelike, with words fitly clothing the thoughts. What good was it to me, O true life, my God, that my declamation was applauded above those of many of my peers and fellow students? Look, was not all that smoke and wind? Was there nothing else on which my talent and my tongue could be exercised?[23] Your praises, Lord, your praises through your Scriptures would have held up the young vine of my heart, and it would not have been snatched away through empty trifles, a shameful prey for the birds. For there is more than one way of offering sacrifice to the rebel angels.[24]

1.18.28 What wonder, then, that I was swept off into vanities like these and went out, away from you, my God, when the men set before me as models were ones who, if they reported some deed of theirs that was not bad with a barbarism or a solecism, were criticized and put to shame; but if they narrated their lusts in correct and properly constructed words, fully and in good order, were praised and took pride in it? You see these things, Lord, and you keep silent, "patient and abundant in mercy and true." Will you always keep silent? Even now you are drawing out of this most monstrous abyss a soul that seeks you and thirsts for your delights, and whose heart says to you, "I have sought your face; your face, Lord, I will seek." For to be far from your face is to be in the darkness of passion.[25] For it is not on foot, or across distances of space, that one goes away from you or comes back

23 Virgil, Aeneid 1.38.
24 The birds recall the birds of the parable that snatch away the seed (Matthew 13:4, 19), here the fallen angels, or demons.
25 Psalm 86:15; Psalm 27:8.

to you. That son of yours did not look for horses or chariots or ships, or fly off on visible wings, or make his journey by bending his knees, so that, living in a far country, he might squander extravagantly what you had given him when he set out—a tender father, because you had given it, and more tender still to him when he came back in need. No: it was in lustful passion, which is to say darkened passion, and that is what it means to be far from your face.[26]

1.18.29 See, Lord God, and see patiently, as indeed you see, how carefully the children of men observe the conventions of letters and syllables received from those who spoke before them, while they neglect the eternal covenants of everlasting salvation received from you. So much so that someone who holds to or teaches those old agreements about sounds, if against the rules of grammar he pronounces "human" without aspirating the first syllable, displeases people more than if, against your commandments, he hates a human being, though he is one himself. As if he could feel any enemy to be more destructive than the very hatred that rouses him against that enemy; or as if anyone could do more damage by persecuting another than he does to his own heart by hating him. And surely the knowledge of letters is no more inward than the conscience written within us, which tells us that we are doing to another what we would not want to suffer ourselves.[27] How hidden you are, dwelling on high in silence, the only great God, who by an untiring law scatter blindness as a punishment over unlawful cravings! A man seeking a reputation for eloquence, standing before a human judge with a crowd of humans around him, pursuing his enemy with the most savage hatred, takes the most vigilant care not to say "inter hominibus" by a slip of the tongue; but that by a frenzy of the mind he may remove a human being from among humans—this he takes no care about.[28]

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26 The parable of the prodigal son, Luke 15:11–32.
27 Latin *homo* ("human being"); dropping the h was a mark of uneducated speech.
28 *Inter hominibus*, "among humans," is a grammatical blunder: *inter* takes the accusative, *inter homines*.

1.19.30 On the threshold of such ways I lay as a boy, wretched, and this was the wrestling school of that arena, where I was more afraid of committing a barbarism than I was careful, if I committed one, not to envy those who did not. I say this and confess it to you, my God: these were the things for which I was praised by the people whom to please was, for me at that time, to live rightly. For I did not see the whirlpool of filth into which I had been cast out of your sight. And in their eyes, what was fouler than I was by then, when I displeased even such people as these, deceiving with countless lies my tutor and my teachers and my parents, out of love of play, eagerness to watch trivial shows, and a restless urge to imitate them? I even stole from my parents' storeroom and from their table, either because my greed commanded it, or so that I might have something to give the boys who sold me a share in their games—games which, all the same, they enjoyed just as much as I did.[29] In those games, too, overcome myself by a vain craving to excel, I often hunted for fraudulent victories. And what was I so unwilling to suffer, and what did I so fiercely denounce if I caught someone at it, as the very thing I was doing to others? And if I was caught and denounced, I preferred to rage rather than give way. Is this the innocence of childhood? It is not, Lord, it is not. I beg you, my God: for these are the very things that pass from tutors and teachers, from nuts and balls and sparrows, to governors and kings, to gold, estates and slaves—these very same things, as the later ages of life succeed one another, just as heavier punishments succeed the schoolmaster's cane. So it was the sign of humility in the small stature of childhood that you, our King, commended when you said, "To such as these belongs the kingdom of heaven."[30]

1.20.31 And yet, Lord, thanks be to you, the most excellent and best Creator and Ruler of the universe, our God, even if you had willed me to be no more than a child. For even then I existed, I

29 The tutor (*paedagogus*) was the household slave who escorted a boy to school and supervised him.
30 Matthew 19:14.

lived and I felt, and I took care of my own well-being—a trace of that most hidden unity from which I came. By an inner sense I guarded the wholeness of my senses, and even in my little thoughts about little things I delighted in the truth. I did not want to be deceived; my memory was strong; I was being furnished with speech; I was comforted by friendship; I shunned pain, humiliation and ignorance. What in such a living creature is not wonderful and praiseworthy? But all these are gifts of my God. I did not give them to myself; and they are good, and all of them together are me. So he who made me is good, and he himself is my good, and I exult before him for all the good things that made me what I was, even as a boy. For this was my sin: that I sought pleasures, heights and truths not in him but in his creatures—in myself and the rest—and so I plunged headlong into pains, confusions and errors. Thanks be to you, my sweetness, my honor, my confidence, my God; thanks be to you for your gifts. But keep them safe for me. For so you will keep me safe, and what you have given me will grow and be made complete, and I myself will be with you, since even my existing is your gift to me.

Book II

Adolescence and the theft of the pears
Augustine recalls his sixteenth year, adolescent lust, and the pointless theft of pears.

2.1.1 I want to call to mind my past foulness and the carnal corruptions of my soul—not because I love them, but so that I may love you, my God. It is for love of your love that I do this, going back over my most wicked ways in the bitterness of recollection, so that you may grow sweet to me—a sweetness that does not deceive, a sweetness happy and secure—and so that you may gather me up from the scattered state in which I was torn to pieces when I turned away from you, the One, and vanished into the many. For there was a time in my youth when I burned to take my fill of the lowest things, and I dared to run wild in a forest of various, shadowy loves; my beauty wasted away, and I rotted before your eyes, pleasing myself and longing to please the eyes of men.

2.2.2 And what was it that delighted me, except to love and to be loved? But the measure was not kept, from mind to mind, where the bright boundary of friendship lies. Instead, mists rose from the muddy lust of the flesh and the bubbling spring of puberty, and they clouded and darkened my heart, so that the clear sky of love could not be told apart from the fog of lust. Both seethed together in confusion, swept my weak youth over the cliffs of craving, and drowned it in a whirlpool of shameful deeds. Your anger had grown strong over me, and I did not know it. I had been deafened by the clanking of the chain of my mortality, the punishment for the pride of my soul; and I went farther from

you, and you let me; and I was tossed about and poured out and spilled and boiled over in my fornications, and you were silent. O my joy, so slow in coming! You were silent then, and I went on, farther and farther from you, into more and more barren seeds of sorrow, in proud dejection and restless weariness.

2.2.3 Who might have tempered my misery, turned the fleeting beauties of the lowest things to good use, and set limits to their sweetness, so that the waves of my youth might have spent themselves on the shore of marriage? If they could not find calm there, content with the purpose of having children, as your law prescribes, Lord—you who shape even the offspring of our death, and are able to lay a gentle hand on the thorns that were shut out of your paradise, to soften them; for your omnipotence is not far from us, even when we are far from you—then at least I should have listened more attentively to the voice from your clouds: "Such people will have trouble in the flesh, and I would spare you"; and "It is good for a man not to touch a woman"; and "He who is without a wife thinks about the things of God, how to please God; but he who is joined in marriage thinks about the things of the world, how to please his wife." These were the voices I should have heeded more attentively, and, cut off for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, I would have waited more happily for your embraces.[1]

2.2.4 But I, wretched, boiled over, following the surge of my own current and leaving you behind; I went beyond all your laws, and I did not escape your scourges. For what mortal does? You were always there, severe in your mercy, sprinkling all my unlawful pleasures with the bitterest disappointments, so that I might look for pleasure without disappointment—and where I could find that, I would find nothing except you, Lord, nothing except you, who make pain a lesson, and strike in order to heal, and kill us so that we may not die away from you. Where was I? And how far was I exiled from the delights of your house in that sixteenth year of my flesh, when the madness of lust—licensed

1 1 Corinthians 7:28, 7:1 and 7:32–33; the last phrase echoes Matthew 19:12, on those who become eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven.

by human shamelessness, but forbidden by your laws—took up its scepter over me, and I surrendered to it completely?[2] My family took no care to catch me in my fall by means of marriage; their only care was that I should learn to make the finest speeches possible and to persuade by my eloquence.

A YEAR IDLE AT HOME

At sixteen, idle at home while money for Carthage was raised, Augustine sinks into lust.

2.3.5 In that year my studies were interrupted. I had been brought home from Madauros, the nearby town where I had already begun to live away from home to study literature and oratory, while the money for a longer stay away, at Carthage, was being got together—more by my father's determination than by his means, for he was a citizen of Thagaste of very modest resources. To whom am I telling this? Not to you, my God; but in your presence I am telling it to my own kind, the human race, however small the portion of it that may come upon these writings of mine. And why do I tell it? Clearly so that I, and whoever reads this, may reflect on what depths we must cry to you from. And what is nearer to your ears than a heart that confesses and a life lived by faith? For who did not praise my father to the skies at that time, because, beyond the means of his household, he spent on his son whatever was needed even for studying so far away?[3] For many citizens far richer did nothing of the kind for their children. And yet this same father of mine did not trouble himself about how I was growing up toward you, or how chaste I was, so long as I was well-spoken—or rather, left a wasteland, untilled by you, God, who are the one true and good Lord of your field, my heart.[4]

2.3.6 But in that sixteenth year, when there was a break in my studies because of the family's finances and I was on holiday

2 Echoes Psalm 94:20 and Deuteronomy 32:39.

3 Thagaste (modern Souk Ahras, Algeria) was Augustine's hometown; Madauros lay some 20 miles to the south. Carthage was the capital of Roman Africa.

from all schooling and living with my parents, the brambles of lust grew up over my head, and there was no hand to root them out. Worse: when that father of mine saw me at the baths, growing into manhood and clothed in restless youth, he told my mother with joy, as though he were already delighted at the thought of grandchildren—the joy of that drunkenness in which this world forgets you, its Creator, and loves your creation instead of you, drunk on the invisible wine of its own will, perverse and bent toward the lowest things. But in my mother's breast you had already begun your temple and laid the foundation of your holy dwelling; my father was still a catechumen, and only recently at that.[5] So she started up in holy alarm and trembling; and though I was not yet baptized, she feared for me the crooked ways walked by those who turn their backs to you and not their faces.

2.3.7 Ah me! Do I dare to say that you were silent, my God, when I was going farther from you? Were you really silent to me then? And whose were they if not yours, those words you sang in my ears through my mother, your faithful one? Yet none of it went down into my heart so that I acted on it. For she wanted—and I remember how she warned me in private, with enormous anxiety—that I should not commit fornication, and above all that I should not commit adultery with anyone's wife. These seemed to me a woman's warnings, which I would have blushed to obey. But they were yours, and I did not know it; I thought that you were silent and that it was she who spoke—she, through whom you were not silent to me—and in her I despised you: I, her son, the son of your handmaid, your servant. But I did not know, and I rushed headlong in such blindness that among boys my own age I was ashamed to be less shameful than they were. I heard them boasting of their outrages and glorying in them all the more, the fouler they were; and I liked doing such things not only for the pleasure of the act but also for the praise. What

4 A Latin pun: *disertus* ("eloquent") and *desertus* ("deserted, left untilled").
5 A catechumen was one receiving instruction in the Christian faith before baptism.

deserves blame but vice? Yet I, so as not to be blamed, grew more vicious; and when I had done nothing that would put me on a par with the depraved, I pretended to have done what I had not done, so as not to seem more contemptible for being more innocent, or be thought cheaper for being more chaste.

2.3.8 See the companions with whom I walked the streets of Babylon and rolled in its mud as if in cinnamon and precious ointments. And to make me stick all the faster in its very navel, the invisible enemy trampled on me and seduced me, because I was easy to seduce. For even she who had already fled from the midst of Babylon, though she still moved more slowly in its other quarters—the mother of my flesh—although she had warned me to be chaste, did not likewise take care, in response to what she had heard about me from her husband, to restrain within the bounds of married love what she sensed was already a plague and a danger for the future, if it could not be cut back to the quick.[6] She did not see to this, because there was fear that my prospects would be hampered by the shackle of a wife—not the hope of the world to come which my mother had in you, but the hope of learning, which both my parents were all too eager for me to acquire: he because he gave almost no thought to you, and only empty thoughts to me; she because she reckoned that the usual course of studies would be not only no hindrance but even some help to me in reaching you. That, at least, is my guess, as I recall, as best I can, the characters of my parents. The reins were also slackened to let me amuse myself, beyond any measure of strictness, to the point of dissipation in all kinds of afflictions; and in all of it there was a fog, my God, shutting me off from the clear sky of your truth, and my wickedness came forth as if from fatness.[7]

6 Babylon stands for the city of this world, from which God's people are told to flee (Jeremiah 51:6).
7 Psalm 73:7.

THE THEFT OF THE PEARS

Augustine recounts stealing pears with a gang of boys, wanting nothing but the theft itself.

2.4.9 Theft is certainly punished by your law, Lord, and by the law written on human hearts, which not even wickedness itself erases. For what thief calmly puts up with a thief? Not even a rich one with one driven by poverty. Yet I wanted to commit theft, and I did it, driven by no need—unless by a poverty of justice and a distaste for it, and a gorging on wickedness. For I stole what I had in plenty, and of much better quality; nor did I want to enjoy the thing I was after by stealing, but the theft itself, and the sin. There was a pear tree near our vineyard, laden with fruit that was tempting neither in looks nor in taste. To shake it and carry off its fruit, we set out, a gang of worthless youths, in the dead of night (we had kept up our games in the streets until then, as was our pestilent habit), and took away huge loads from it—not to feast on ourselves, but perhaps to throw to the pigs, even if we did eat some; what mattered was that we did something that pleased us because it was forbidden. Here is my heart, God, here is my heart, on which you had mercy at the bottom of the abyss. Let my heart now tell you what it was looking for there: that I should be wicked for nothing, with no cause for my wickedness except wickedness itself. It was foul, and I loved it. I loved to perish; I loved my own failing—not the thing for which I failed, but my failing itself I loved: a base soul, leaping down from your firm ground into destruction, seeking not something by shameful means, but the shame itself.

2.5.10 There is, after all, beauty in lovely bodies, in gold and silver and all things; in the touch of the flesh, harmony counts for most; and each of the other senses has its own fitting adjustment of bodies. Worldly honor, too, and the power to command and to prevail, have their own splendor—which is also where the eagerness for revenge springs from. And yet, to obtain all these

things, we must not go out from you, Lord, or stray from your law. The life we live here also has its allure, because of a certain measure of its own grace and its harmony with all these lowest beauties. Human friendship, too, is sweet with its dear bond, because of the unity it makes out of many minds. For the sake of all these, and things like them, sin is committed, when, through an immoderate leaning toward them—though they are the lowest goods—the better and highest are deserted: you, Lord our God, and your truth, and your law. For these lowest things too have their delights, but not like my God, who made all things; for in him the righteous one delights, and he himself is the joy of the upright in heart.

2.5.11 So when a crime is being investigated and the question is why it was done, people do not usually believe it until it appears that there could have been a desire to obtain one of those goods we have called the lowest, or a fear of losing one. For they are beautiful and attractive, though compared with the higher goods that bring happiness they are base and lowly. A man has committed murder. Why did he do it? He loved the victim's wife or his estate; or he wanted to rob him to have something to live on; or he feared losing something of the kind to him; or, having been wronged, he burned to avenge himself. Would he commit murder without a cause, delighting in murder for its own sake? Who would believe it? Even that insane and utterly cruel man, of whom it was said that he was wicked and cruel for no reason, still had a cause assigned to him: "so that," the writer says, "his hand or his mind should not grow sluggish through idleness." Why that too? Why so? Clearly so that, by that practice in crime, once he had seized the city he might obtain honors, power and riches, and be free from fear of the laws and from the difficulties caused by "the lack of family means and the consciousness of his crimes." So not even Catiline himself loved his crimes, but something else, for whose sake he committed them.[8]

2.6.12 What did I, wretched one, love in you, my theft, you nighttime crime of mine in my sixteenth year? You were not

beautiful, since you were theft. Or are you anything at all, that I should speak to you? Those pears we stole were beautiful, because they were your creation, most beautiful of all, Creator of all, good God, God the highest good and my true good. Those pears were beautiful, but it was not them that my wretched soul desired. For I had plenty of better ones; those I picked only in order to steal. Once picked, I threw them away, having feasted only on the wickedness, which I enjoyed with delight. For if any of those pears did get into my mouth, what seasoned it there was the crime. And now, Lord my God, I ask what it was that delighted me in the theft, and look—there is no beauty in it at all. I do not mean the beauty that is in justice and prudence; nor even the beauty in the human mind and memory and senses and growing life; nor that of the stars, beautiful and graceful in their places, or of earth and sea, full of offspring that, by being born, take the place of those that pass away. It does not have even that flawed and shadowy kind of beauty found in the vices that deceive.

2.6.13 For pride imitates loftiness, whereas you alone are God, exalted above all. And what does ambition seek but honors and glory, whereas you alone are to be honored above all and are glorious forever? The cruelty of the powerful wants to be feared: but who is to be feared except God alone, from whose power what can be seized or stolen away—when, or where, or whither, or by whom? The caresses of the wanton want to be loved: but nothing is more caressing than your love, and nothing is loved more healthfully than your truth, beautiful and radiant beyond all things. Curiosity poses as a zeal for knowledge, whereas you know all things supremely. Even ignorance and stupidity cloak themselves under the names of simplicity and innocence, because nothing is found simpler than you. And what is more innocent than you, since it is the wicked whose own works are their enemies? Sloth seeks rest, as it were: but what sure rest is there apart from the Lord? Self-indulgence wants to be called

8 Catiline led a failed conspiracy to seize power in Rome in 63 BC; the quotations are from Sallust's *War with Catiline* (16 and 5).

fullness and abundance: but you are fullness and the unfailing plenty of incorruptible sweetness. Prodigality casts a shadow of generosity: but you are the most lavish giver of all good things. Greed wants to possess much: and you possess all things. Envy fights for preeminence: what is more preeminent than you? Anger seeks revenge: who takes revenge more justly than you? Fear shrinks from what is unusual and sudden, threatening the things it loves, while it looks out for its own security: but what is unusual to you? What is sudden? Or who can separate you from what you love? Or where is there firm security, except with you? Sadness pines away over the loss of things in which craving took its pleasure, because it would like nothing to be taken from it, as nothing can be taken from you.

2.6.14 So the soul commits fornication when it turns away from you and seeks outside you what it can find pure and clear only when it returns to you. All who put themselves far from you and raise themselves up against you imitate you perversely. But even by imitating you in this way they show that you are the Creator of all nature, and that there is therefore nowhere to go to get away from you altogether. What, then, did I love in that theft? In what way did I imitate my Lord, even if viciously and perversely? Was it that I took pleasure in acting against the law, at least by deceit, since I could not by power—so that, a prisoner, I might imitate a maimed freedom by doing with impunity what was not allowed, in a dark likeness of omnipotence? Here is that slave, fleeing his master and chasing a shadow. O rottenness! O monstrous life, and depth of death! Could what was not allowed give me pleasure for no other reason than that it was not allowed?

2.7.15 What shall I give back to the Lord, that my memory recalls these things and yet my soul is not afraid of them? I will love you, Lord, and thank you, and confess your name, because you have forgiven me such great evils, such wicked deeds of mine. I credit it to your grace and your mercy that you have melted away my sins like ice. I credit to your grace also whatever evils I did not do. For what could I not have done, I

who loved even a crime for its own sake? And I confess that all has been forgiven me—both the evils I did of my own accord and those I did not do because you were my guide. What man is there who, considering his own weakness, dares to attribute his chastity and innocence to his own strength, so as to love you less—as if he had less need of your mercy, by which you forgive the sins of those who turn to you?[9] For let anyone who, called by you, has followed your voice and avoided the things he reads me recalling and confessing about myself, not laugh at me for being healed, sick as I was, by the same physician who granted him not to fall sick—or rather, to be less sick. Let him therefore love you just as much, or indeed even more; for he sees that the one through whom I am being freed from such great sicknesses of my sins is the one through whom he himself is kept from being entangled in such great sicknesses of sin.

WHY STEAL WITH FRIENDS?

Augustine concludes he would never have stolen alone and that he loved the shared thrill of wrongdoing.

2.8.16 What fruit did I, wretched, ever have from these things that I now blush to recall—above all from that theft, in which I loved the theft itself and nothing else, when it was itself nothing, and I all the more wretched for it? And yet alone I would not have done it—so I remember my state of mind at the time—alone I would not have done it at all. So in it I also loved the company of those I did it with. Then it is not true that I loved nothing but the theft? No, it is true: nothing else, because that too is nothing. What is it, really? Who is there to teach me, except the one who lights up my heart and sorts out its shadows? What is it? This is what has come into my mind to ask, to discuss and to consider: if I had loved those pears I stole and wanted to enjoy them, I could have done it even alone, if committing that wickedness had been enough to bring me to my pleasure; nor would I have inflamed the itch of my craving by rubbing it against the minds

9 The opening echoes Psalm 116:12.

of accomplices. But since my pleasure was not in the pears, it was in the crime itself, and it was the company of others sinning with me that produced it.

2.9.17 What was that state of mind? Certainly it was utterly, excessively foul, and woe to me who had it. But still, what was it? "Who understands his sins?" It was a laugh, as though our hearts were being tickled, because we were fooling people who did not think we would do such things and would have strongly objected. Why, then, did it delight me that I was not doing it alone? Is it because no one easily laughs alone? No one easily, it is true; but still, laughter does sometimes overcome people even when they are by themselves, with no one else present, if something very funny strikes the senses or the mind. But I would not have done that alone; alone I would not have done it at all. See, here before you, my God, is the living memory of my soul.[10] Alone I would not have committed that theft, in which what pleased me was not what I stole but that I stole; and doing it alone would not have pleased me in the least, nor would I have done it. O friendship, all too unfriendly! Unfathomable seduction of the mind, greed to do harm arising from play and jest, appetite for another's loss, without any lust for gain of my own or for revenge! But when someone says, "Come on, let's do it," one is ashamed not to be shameless.

2.10.18 Who can untie this most twisted and tangled knot? It is foul; I do not want to look at it, I do not want to see it. I want you, justice and innocence, beautiful and lovely to pure eyes, whose fullness never cloys. With you there is deep rest and a life that nothing can disturb. Whoever enters into you enters into the joy of his Lord, and will not fear, and will be at his best in the Best. I slipped away from you, my God, and wandered, straying too far from your steadfastness in my youth, and I became to myself a land of want.[11]

10 Psalm 19:12.

11 Echoes Matthew 25:21 and the "far country" of the prodigal son (Luke 15:14).

Book III

Carthage, Cicero's Hortensius, and the Manichees
As a student in Carthage, Augustine discovers philosophy and joins the Manichees.

CARTHAGE

Arriving in Carthage as a student, Augustine seeks love and is tangled in shameful affairs.

3.1.1 I came to Carthage, and all around me there sizzled a frying pan of shameful loves. I was not yet in love, but I loved to love, and with a more hidden need I hated myself for needing less. I was looking for something to love, in love with loving, and I hated safety and a path without snares. For I had a hunger within me, for the inner food—you yourself, my God—yet that hunger did not make me hungry; I had no desire for incorruptible nourishment, not because I was full of it, but because the emptier I was, the more I loathed it. And so my soul was in poor health; covered in sores, it flung itself outward, wretchedly eager to be scratched by contact with the things of sense. But if these had no soul, they would certainly not be loved. To love and to be loved was sweet to me, all the more if I could also enjoy the body of the one I loved.[1] So I fouled the spring of friendship with the filth of lust, and clouded its brightness with the hell of desire; and yet, foul and disgraceful as I was, I longed, in my overflowing vanity, to be elegant and sophisticated. I rushed, too, into love, by which I longed to be captured. My God, my mercy, with how much gall did you, in your goodness,

1 A Latin pun: *Carthago* (Carthage) and *sartago* (a frying pan).

sprinkle that sweetness for me! For I was loved, and I arrived at the bond of enjoyment, and I was happily tied up in painful knots, so that I might be beaten with the red-hot iron rods of jealousy and suspicions and fears and angers and quarrels.

TEARS AT THE THEATER

Augustine asks why theater audiences enjoy grieving over fictional suffering they would never want themselves.

3.2.2 I was carried away by the shows of the theater, full of images of my own miseries and of fuel for my fire. Why is it that a person wants to feel pain there, watching sad and tragic events that he would not want to suffer himself? And yet as a spectator he wants to feel pain from them, and the pain itself is his pleasure. What is this but a wretched madness? For the less free someone is from such feelings, the more he is moved by them—although when a person suffers himself it is usually called misery, and when he suffers with others, compassion. But what sort of compassion is it, after all, that is felt for fictions on the stage? The listener is not called on to help, only invited to grieve; and the more he grieves, the more he applauds the author of those images. And if those human disasters, whether from long ago or made up, are staged in such a way that the spectator feels no pain, he leaves in disgust, finding fault; but if he does feel pain, he stays riveted and enjoys it.

3.2.3 So tears are loved, and pains. Yet surely every human being wants to rejoice. Or is it that, while no one likes to be miserable, people do like to be compassionate, and since this cannot happen without pain, for this reason alone pains are loved? This too flows from that spring of friendship. But where does it go? Where does it flow? Why does it run down into a torrent of boiling pitch, into the monstrous surges of foul lusts, into which it is itself changed and turned by its own consent, twisted and thrown down from its heavenly calm? Should compassion, then, be rejected? Not at all. So let pains sometimes be loved. But beware of uncleanness, my soul, under the protection of my

God, the God of our fathers, worthy of praise and exalted above all forever—beware of uncleanness. For I am not without compassion now; but back then, in the theaters, I shared the joy of the lovers when they enjoyed each other in shameful acts, even though they were only playing it out in the make-believe of the show.[2] And when they lost each other, I was saddened, as though I were compassionate; and yet both delighted me. But now I feel more compassion for someone who rejoices in a shameful act than for someone who has, as it were, endured hardship through being deprived of a ruinous pleasure and losing a miserable happiness. This is certainly truer compassion, but in it the pain gives no delight. For although one who grieves for the wretched is commended for performing a duty of love, still the person who is genuinely compassionate would much rather there were nothing to grieve over. For if there were such a thing as malevolent benevolence—which is impossible—then someone who truly and sincerely feels compassion could also wish there to be wretched people, so that he could feel compassion for them. So some pain is to be approved, but none is to be loved. For this is how you, Lord God, who love souls, feel compassion far, far more purely than we do, and more incorruptibly: you are wounded by no pain. "And who is equal to these things?"[3]

3.2.4 But I, wretched as I was then, loved to grieve, and I went looking for something to grieve over, when, in someone else's misfortune—a false one, danced out on the stage—the actor's performance pleased me more and drew me more strongly, the more it shook tears from me. What wonder, when I, an unhappy sheep straying from your flock and impatient of your care, was disfigured with a foul mange? That was the source of my love of pains—not pains that would pierce me deeply (for I did not love to suffer the kinds of things I loved to watch), but ones which, heard and invented, would scratch me, as it were, on the sur-

2 The praise of God echoes the Song of the Three Young Men (Daniel 3:52 in the Latin Bible).

3 2 Corinthians 2:16.

face. Yet, as happens with scratching fingernails, a burning swelling followed, and festering, and horrible pus. Such was my life—was it a life, my God?

3.3.5 And your mercy, faithful from afar, hovered over me. Into what wickednesses I wasted away! What sacrilegious curiosity I followed, so that, having deserted you, it led me down to the faithless depths and the deceitful services of demons, to whom I offered my evil deeds in sacrifice! And in all of them you scourged me. I even dared, during the celebration of your solemn rites, within the walls of your church, to desire and to carry through an affair for obtaining the fruits of death. For this you lashed me with heavy punishments, but nothing in proportion to my guilt—O you, my immense mercy, my God, my refuge from the terrible powers that do harm, among whom I wandered with my neck stiff with overconfidence, to go farther and farther away from you, loving my ways and not yours, loving a runaway's freedom.

3.3.6 Those studies, too, that were called respectable had their direction, looking toward the quarrelsome law courts, so that I might excel in them—the more deceitful, the more praised. Such is the blindness of human beings, who even glory in their blindness. And I was already at the top of the rhetoric school, and I rejoiced proudly and swelled with conceit—though I was much quieter, Lord, you know it, and kept entirely clear of the "wrecking" done by the Wreckers (for this sinister and devilish name is worn as a badge of sophistication). I lived among them with a shameless kind of shame, because I was not one of them. I was with them, and sometimes enjoyed their friendship, though I always shrank from their deeds—that is, from the wreckings with which they wantonly attacked the modesty of newcomers, harassing it for no reason by mockery and so feeding their own malicious glee. Nothing is more like the behavior of demons than that.[4] What name, then, could be truer for them than Wreckers, since they themselves had first been plainly wrecked

4 The "Wreckers" (*eversores*) were a gang of rowdy students at Carthage who bullied newcomers.

and warped, while deceiving spirits secretly mocked them and led them astray in the very thing in which they love to mock and deceive others?

READING CICERO'S HORTENSIUS

At nineteen, Cicero's Hortensius fires Augustine with a longing for wisdom, but Scripture seems crude to him.

3.4.7 Among these companions, at that still impressionable age, I was studying the textbooks of eloquence, in which I longed to stand out—a damnable and windy goal, pursued for the joys of human vanity. Following the usual order of study, I had come to a book by a certain Cicero, whose tongue nearly everyone admires, though not his heart. But this book of his contains an exhortation to philosophy, and it is called *Hortensius*. That book changed my feelings. It turned my prayers toward you yourself, Lord, and made my hopes and longings different. Suddenly every empty hope grew worthless to me, and with an unbelievable burning of heart I longed for the immortality of wisdom. I had begun to rise, so as to return to you.[5] For it was not to sharpen my tongue—which is what I seemed to be buying with my mother's money, since I was in my nineteenth year and my father had died two years before—it was not, I say, to sharpen my tongue that I took up that book. What had won me over was not its style but what it said.

3.4.8 How I burned, my God, how I burned to fly back from earthly things to you—and I did not know what you were doing with me! For with you is wisdom. Now the love of wisdom has a Greek name, "philosophy," and it was for this that those pages set me on fire. There are people who lead others astray through philosophy, coloring and painting over their errors with that great, attractive, and honorable name. Nearly all such people, of Cicero's time and earlier, are singled out and exposed in that book. And there the saving warning of your Spirit, given

5 Cicero (106–43 BC), the great Roman orator and statesman. His *Hortensius*, an exhortation to philosophy, now survives only in fragments.

through your good and devoted servant, is made plain: "See that no one deceives you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elements of this world, and not according to Christ; for in him the whole fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily." At that time—you know it, light of my heart—these words of the apostle were not yet known to me. Even so, the one thing that delighted me in that exhortation was this: it urged me to love and seek and pursue and hold and firmly embrace not this or that school, but wisdom itself, whatever it might be. That speech roused me, kindled me, set me burning. And in such a blaze the only thing that checked me was that the name of Christ was not there. For by your mercy, Lord, this name—the name of my Savior, your Son—my tender heart had devoutly drunk in with my mother's very milk and kept deep within. Whatever lacked this name, however learned and polished and truthful, could not carry me away completely.[6]

3.5.9 So I decided to turn my mind to the holy Scriptures and see what they were like. And look: I see something not disclosed to the proud, nor laid bare to children, but humble at the entrance, lofty further in, and veiled in mysteries. I was not the kind of person who could enter it, or bow my neck to follow its steps. For when I first turned to that Scripture I did not feel as I speak now; it seemed to me unworthy to be compared with the dignity of Cicero. My swollen pride shrank from its plainness, and my sharp eye could not pierce its depths. Yet it was the kind of thing that grows along with little ones. But I scorned to be a little one, and, puffed up with arrogance, I thought myself big.

AMONG THE MANICHEES

Augustine joins the Manichees, whose materialist fables and objections to the Old Testament capture him.

3.6.10 And so I fell in with people raving in their pride, all too carnal and full of talk. In their mouths were the devil's snares, a birdlime made by mixing together the syllables of your name,

6 Colossians 2:8–9; the "servant" is the apostle Paul.

and of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Paraclete, our Comforter, the Holy Spirit. These names never left their lips, but only as sound and the noise of the tongue; their heart was empty of truth. They kept saying, "Truth, truth," and said it to me often, yet it was nowhere in them. Instead they spoke falsehoods, not only about you, who truly are the Truth, but also about the elements of this world, your creation—though even the philosophers who spoke truly about those things I ought to have passed beyond for love of you, my Father, supremely good, beauty of all things beautiful.[7] O Truth, Truth, how deeply even then the marrow of my mind sighed for you, while they sounded your name at me often and in many ways, by voice alone and in many huge books! These were the dishes on which, to me in my hunger for you, they served up the sun and the moon—your beautiful works, but still your works, not you, and not even the first of them. For your spiritual works come before these bodily ones, however bright and heavenly. But it was not even for those first works that I hungered and thirsted, but for you yourself, the Truth, "with whom there is no change, nor shadow of turning." And on those dishes they kept setting before me glittering phantasms. Better by far to love this sun, which is at least real to these eyes, than those falsehoods that deceive the mind by way of the eyes.[8] And yet, because I thought they were you, I ate—not greedily, since you did not taste in my mouth as you are (for you were not those empty fictions), and I was not nourished by them but drained instead. Food in dreams is very like the food of people who are awake, yet sleepers are not fed by it; they are asleep. But those things were not like you in any way, as you have now told me, because they were bodily phantasms, false bodies. The real bodies we see with the eyes of the flesh, whether in the sky or on the earth, are more certain than they are; we see them along with the beasts and the birds. We see

7 These are the Manichees, followers of the Persian prophet Mani (3rd century AD), who taught that the world is a battleground between two powers, Light and Darkness. Augustine belonged to the sect for about nine years.
8 James 1:17.

these things, and they are more certain than when we imagine them. And again, we imagine them with more certainty than when, starting from them, we conjecture other things, greater and infinite, which do not exist at all. On such empty things I fed then—and was not fed. But you, my love, for whom I grow faint so that I may be strong, you are not those bodies we see, even in the sky, nor those we do not see there; for you made them, and you do not count them even among the highest things you have made. How far, then, you are from those phantasms of mine, phantasms of bodies that do not exist at all! More certain than they are the mental images of bodies that do exist, and more certain than those images are the bodies themselves—and yet you are not these. Nor are you the soul, which is the life of bodies (and so the life of bodies is better and more certain than bodies). You are the life of souls, the life of lives, living by yourself, and you do not change, life of my soul.

3.6.11 Where were you for me then, and how far away? Far from you I was wandering, shut out even from the husks of the pigs, I who was feeding them husks. How much better are the tales of the grammarians and poets than those traps! Verse and poetry and Medea flying are surely more useful than the five elements, variously painted up to match the five caves of darkness—things that do not exist at all, and that kill those who believe in them. Verse and poetry I can even turn into real nourishment. As for Medea flying, even when I recited it I did not assert it, and when I heard it recited I did not believe it. But those things I believed—alas, alas![9] By such steps I was led down into the depths of hell, toiling and feverish for lack of truth, since I was seeking you, my God—I confess it to you, who had mercy on me even before I confessed—not by the understanding of the mind, by which you willed me to surpass the beasts, but by the senses of the flesh. But you were more inward than my innermost self, and higher than my highest. I came upon that bold woman who lacks

9 The husks: Luke 15:16. Medea, the sorceress of Greek myth, escapes in a flying chariot; the five elements and five caves of darkness belong to Manichee cosmology.

prudence, Solomon's riddle, sitting on a chair at her door and saying, "Eat hidden bread gladly, and drink sweet stolen water." She seduced me, because she found me living outside myself, in the eye of my flesh, and chewing over within me the sort of things I had swallowed through that eye.[10]

3.7.12 For I did not know that other reality, what truly is, and I was nudged, as if by some cleverness, into siding with foolish deceivers when they asked me where evil comes from, whether God was bounded by a bodily shape and had hair and nails, and whether people should be considered righteous who had many wives at once, and killed human beings, and sacrificed animals. Ignorant of these matters, I was thrown into confusion by them; and while I was moving away from the truth, I seemed to myself to be moving toward it. For I did not know that evil is nothing but a privation of good, to the point where nothing at all remains. (And how could I see this, when my seeing went no further than bodies with my eyes, and no further than phantasms with my mind?) I did not know that God is spirit, not something with limbs stretching in length and breadth, nor something whose being is bulk. For bulk is smaller in a part than in its whole; and even if it is infinite, it is smaller in any part bounded by a fixed space than across its infinity, and it is not whole everywhere, as spirit is, as God is. And what it is in us by which we exist, and in what respect Scripture says we are "in the image of God," I was entirely ignorant.[11]

3.7.13 Nor did I know the true inner justice, which judges not by custom but by the most excellent law of almighty God. By that law the customs of places and times are shaped to suit those places and times, while the law itself is everywhere and always, not one thing here and another there, nor one way now and another then. By it Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Moses and David were righteous, and all those praised by the mouth of God. I did not know that such men are judged wicked by the ignorant, who judge by a merely human day and measure the

10 Proverbs 9:13–17.
11 John 4:24; Genesis 1:27.

whole morality of the human race by the yardstick of their own. It is as if someone who knew nothing about armor, or which piece fits which limb, wanted to cover his head with a shin-guard and shoe his feet with a helmet, and then grumbled that they did not fit. Or as if, on a day when business was suspended from noon, someone were angry that he was not allowed to put something up for sale in the afternoon, since it had been allowed in the morning. Or as if, in one household, he saw a slave handling something that the one who serves the cups is not permitted to touch, or something done behind the stable that is forbidden at the table, and resented that, when it is one dwelling and one household, the same thing is not granted everywhere and to everyone.[12] Such are those who are indignant when they hear that in that age something was permitted to the righteous which is not permitted to the righteous in this one; that God commanded one thing to those and another to these, for reasons of the times, though both served the same justice. Yet in one person, on one day, in one house, they see one thing suiting one limb and another another; something allowed a moment ago not allowed an hour later; something permitted or even commanded in that corner which is forbidden and punished in this one next to it. Is justice, then, varied and changeable? No; but the times over which it presides do not move in step, for they are times. Human beings, whose life on earth is short, cannot by their own perception connect the circumstances of earlier ages and other peoples, which they have not experienced, with those they have. But in a single body or day or house they can easily see what suits which limb, at which moments, in which parts or for which persons. And so in the one case they take offense; in the other they comply.

3.7.14 These things I did not know then, nor did I notice them. They struck my eyes on every side, and I did not see. I was writing poems, and I was not allowed to put any foot anywhere I liked: it went differently in one meter and another, and even

12 "A human day" echoes 1 Corinthians 4:3, where Paul speaks of being judged by a human court.

within a single line the same foot did not belong in every position. Yet the art by which I composed did not have one rule here and another there; it held them all at once. And I did not see that justice, which good and holy people have served, holds all its commands together at once, in a far more excellent and sublime way, and varies in no part, and yet in varied times assigns and commands not everything at once, but what is proper to each. In my blindness I found fault with the devout patriarchs, who not only used the things of the present as God commanded and inspired them, but also foretold the future as God revealed it.

3.8.15 Is it ever, anywhere, unjust to love God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself? So shameful acts against nature, such as those of the people of Sodom, are to be detested and punished everywhere and always. Even if every nation committed them, all would be held guilty of the same crime under the divine law, which did not make human beings to use one another in that way. For the very fellowship that ought to exist between us and God is violated when the nature of which he is the author is polluted by perverted lust. But shameful acts against human customs are to be avoided according to the diversity of those customs, so that the agreement a city or nation has confirmed among itself by custom or law may not be violated by the lust of any citizen or foreigner. For every part that does not fit its whole is ugly.[13] But when God commands something contrary to the custom or agreement of any people, even if it has never been done there, it must be done; if it has lapsed, it must be restored; if it was never established, it must be established. For if a king may command, in the city he rules, something that neither anyone before him nor he himself had ever commanded, and obeying him is not against the fellowship of that city—indeed, not obeying him is against it, for it is a general agreement of human society to obey its kings—how much more must we serve God, the ruler of all creation, without hesitation in whatever he commands! For just as among the authorities of human society the

13 Matthew 22:37–39.

greater authority is set above the lesser to be obeyed, so God is set above all.

3.8.16 So too with crimes, where there is a lust to do harm, whether by insult or by injury. Both are done either for revenge, as enemy against enemy; or to gain some advantage that belongs to another, as a robber against a traveler; or to avoid some evil, as against someone who is feared; or out of envy, as the less fortunate against the more fortunate, or as someone who has prospered in something against one he fears may become his equal, or resents as his equal already; or for the sheer pleasure of another's pain, as with spectators of gladiators, or those who jeer and make fools of anyone at all. These are the chief heads of wickedness. They sprout from the lust for power, the lust of the eyes, and the lust of the senses—from one of them, or two, or all three at once. And so people live badly, against the three and the seven, the ten-stringed harp, your Ten Commandments, O God most high and most sweet. But what shameful acts can touch you, who cannot be corrupted? Or what crimes can be done against you, who cannot be harmed?[14] But you punish what human beings commit against themselves, because even when they sin against you, they act wickedly against their own souls, and iniquity lies to itself. They do so by corrupting and perverting their own nature, which you made and set in order; or by using permitted things without restraint; or by burning for things not permitted, for that use which is against nature. Or they are held guilty of raging against you in mind and word, kicking against the goad; or when, breaking through the boundaries of human society, they boldly delight in private alliances or feuds, according to what has pleased or offended them. These things happen when you are forsaken, fountain of life, who are the one true creator and ruler of the universe, and when, out of private pride, a false unity is loved in a part. So it is by humble devotion that we return to you. You cleanse us from bad habit,

14 The "three and the seven" are the commandments concerning God and those concerning one's neighbor; the "ten-stringed harp" comes from the Psalms (e.g. Psalm 144:9).

you are merciful to the sins of those who confess, you hear the groans of those in chains, and you release us from the chains we have made for ourselves—provided we no longer raise against you the horns of a false freedom, greedy to have more and so losing everything, loving our own private good more than you, the good of all.

3.9.17 But among shameful acts and crimes and so many iniquities there are also the sins of those who are making progress. These are blamed by good judges by the standard of perfection, yet praised in hope of fruit, like the green blade of the grain. And there are some things that look like a shameful act or a crime, yet are not sins, because they offend neither you, the Lord our God, nor the fellowship of society. Such is the case when things are acquired for the needs of life, suited to the time, though it is uncertain whether it was done from a lust for possessing; or when people are punished by duly constituted authority from zeal to correct them, though it is uncertain whether it was done from a lust to harm. So many deeds that people would think should be condemned are approved by your testimony, and many that people praise are condemned with you as witness. For often the outward look of a deed is one thing, and the mind of the doer, and the unseen circumstance of the moment, quite another. But when you suddenly command something unusual and unforeseen, even if you once forbade it, even if for the time being you hide the reason for your command, and even if it runs against the agreement of some human society, who would doubt that it must be done, since only that human society is just which serves you? But happy are those who know that you commanded it. For everything is done by those who serve you either to show what is needed for the present or to foretell what is to come.

3.10.18 Not knowing these things, I used to mock those holy servants and prophets of yours. And what was I doing when I mocked them, except making myself mocked by you? Gradually, little by little, I was led into such nonsense as to believe that a fig weeps when it is picked, and that the mother tree weeps

milky tears. Yet if some saint ate that fig—picked, of course, by someone else's crime, not his own—he would mix it into his insides and breathe out angels from it, or rather particles of God, as he groaned and belched in prayer. These particles of the supreme and true God would have stayed bound in that fruit, had they not been set free by the teeth and belly of one of the Elect. And I believed, wretch that I was, that more mercy should be shown to the fruits of the earth than to the human beings for whose sake they grow. For if someone hungry who was not a Manichee asked for food, giving him even a mouthful seemed to deserve something like a death sentence.[15]

MONICA'S DREAM

Monica weeps for her son, dreams of his return to faith, and is reassured by a bishop.

3.11.19 And you sent your hand from on high and drew my soul out of this deep darkness, when my mother, your faithful servant, wept for me to you more than mothers weep over the bodies of their dead. For by the faith and spirit she had from you she saw my death, and you heard her, Lord. You heard her and did not despise her tears, which streamed down and watered the ground beneath her eyes wherever she prayed; you heard her. For where else did that dream come from, by which you consoled her, so that she agreed to live with me and share one table with me in her house? (She had begun to refuse this, turning away from and loathing the blasphemies of my error.) She saw herself standing on a kind of wooden rule, and a radiant young man coming toward her, cheerful and smiling at her, while she was grieving and worn out with grief. He asked her the reasons for her sadness and her daily tears—asking, as such visitors do, in order to teach rather than to learn. When she replied that she was mourning my ruin, he told her to be at peace, and urged her

15 In Manichee teaching the "Elect" were the fully initiated, whose eating was believed to free particles of divine light trapped in plants; ordinary "hearers," like Augustine, supplied their food.

to look closely and see that where she was, there I was too. And when she looked, she saw me standing beside her on the same rule. Where did this come from, unless your ears were close to her heart, O you who are good and almighty, who care for each one of us as if you cared for that one alone, and for all as for each?

3.11.20 And where did this come from, too? When she told me about the vision, and I tried to twist it to mean rather that she should not despair of becoming what I was, she said at once, without the least hesitation, "No. It was not said to me, 'Where he is, there you are too,' but 'Where you are, there he is too.'" I confess to you, Lord, my recollection, as far as I recall it—and I have often spoken of it: I was more moved by this answer of yours through my mother—that she was not shaken by so plausible a false interpretation, and saw so quickly what was there to be seen, which I certainly had not seen before she spoke—than I was by the dream itself. In that dream the joy of this devout woman, which would come so much later, was foretold so long before, to console her in her present anxiety. For almost nine years followed in which I wallowed in that mud of the deep and in the darkness of falsehood, often trying to rise and being dashed down all the harder. And all the while that chaste widow, devout and sober, the kind you love—now more cheerful in hope, but no less tireless in weeping and groaning—never stopped, at every hour of her prayers, mourning over me to you. Her prayers entered into your sight, and yet you still let me tumble and be tangled in that darkness.

3.12.21 Meanwhile you gave another answer, which I recall. (I pass over many things, because I am hurrying on to those that press me more urgently to confess to you, and many I do not remember.) You gave this other answer through a priest of yours, a bishop raised in the Church and well trained in your books. When that woman asked him to be kind enough to talk with me, refute my errors, unteach me what was bad and teach me what was good—for she used to do this whenever she happened to find suitable people—he refused, and wisely, as I

realized later. He replied that I was still unteachable, because I was puffed up with the novelty of that heresy and had already stirred up many inexperienced people with some petty questions, as she herself had told him. "But," he said, "leave him where he is. Just pray to the Lord for him. By his own reading he will discover what that error is, and how great its impiety." He also told her that he himself, as a little boy, had been handed over to the Manichees by his mother, who had been led astray; that he had not only read nearly all their books but had even copied them out; and that it had become clear to him, with no one arguing against him or refuting him, how much that sect was to be fled—and so he had fled it. When he had said this and she still would not rest content, but pressed him all the harder, pleading and weeping floods of tears, to see me and talk with me, he, by now somewhat irritated, said: "Go away from me. As surely as you live, it cannot be that the son of these tears should perish." In her conversations with me she often recalled that she had taken this as if it had sounded from heaven.

Book IV

Teaching at Thagaste and the death of a friend
Augustine teaches rhetoric, consults astrologers, and grieves the death of a close friend.

4.1.1 Through that same period of nine years, from my nineteenth year to my twenty-eighth, we were led astray and led others astray, deceived and deceiving in various cravings: openly through the studies they call liberal, secretly under the false name of religion—proud in the one, superstitious in the other, empty in both. On one side we chased the emptiness of popular glory, down to the applause of the theater, and poetry contests, and competitions for crowns of grass, and the trifles of the shows, and unbridled lusts. On the other side we sought to be cleansed of this filth by bringing food to those who were called the Elect and holy, so that in the workshops of their stomachs they might manufacture for us angels and gods, through whom we would be set free. These things I pursued and practiced with my friends, who were deceived through me and with me. Let the arrogant laugh at me, those who have not yet been brought low and crushed by you for their own good, my God; still I will confess my shameful deeds to you, in your praise. Allow me, I beg you, and grant me to go round again in present memory the past rounds of my error, and to offer you a sacrifice of joy. For what am I to myself without you but a guide to my own downfall? Or what am I, when all is well with me, but a child sucking your milk, or feeding on you, the food that does not perish? And what is any human being, whoever he may be, since he is only

human? Let the strong and powerful laugh at us; but let us, weak and needy, confess to you.

4.2.2 In those years I was teaching the art of rhetoric, and, conquered by craving, I sold the talk that conquers. Yet I preferred, Lord, you know it, to have good students, as "good" is commonly understood, and without guile I taught them guile—not to be used against the life of an innocent man, but sometimes to save the life of a guilty one. And you, God, saw from afar my faith slipping on slippery ground and glimmering through thick smoke—the faith I showed in that teaching to those who loved vanity and sought lies, myself their companion. In those years I had one woman, not joined to me in what is called lawful marriage, but one whom my restless passion, lacking prudence, had tracked down. Still, she was only one, and I kept faith with her bed. With her I learned by my own experience the difference between the restraint of a marriage contract, entered into for the sake of having children, and a pact of lustful love, in which children are born even against our wishes—though once born, they compel us to love them.[1]

4.2.3 I remember, too, that when I had decided to enter a competition for theatrical verse, some soothsayer sent to ask me what fee I would pay him to make me win. But I detested and loathed those foul rites, and answered that even if the crown were of immortal gold, I would not allow a fly to be killed for my victory. For he was going to kill living creatures in his sacrifices, and with those offerings, it seemed, he would invite demons to take my side. But this evil too I rejected not out of any purity toward you, God of my heart. For I did not know how to love you, since I could think of nothing but bodily splendors. Does not a soul that sighs after such fictions commit fornication, away from you, and trust in falsehoods, and feed the winds? And yet, of course, I would not have sacrifices offered to demons on my behalf—while by that superstition I was offering myself to them as a sacrifice. For what else is feeding the winds but feed-

1 Augustine never names this woman; he lived with her for some fifteen years. Their son, Adeodatus, is named in Book IX.

ing those very spirits—that is, by going astray, becoming their pleasure and their laughingstock?

CONSULTING ASTROLOGERS

Augustine consults astrologers despite warnings from a wise old physician and his friend Nebridius.

4.3.4 So I did not stop openly consulting those charlatans they call astrologers, on the grounds that they offered practically no sacrifice and directed no prayers to any spirit for the sake of divination. Yet true Christian piety consistently rejects and condemns this too. For it is good to confess to you, Lord, and to say, "Have mercy on me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against you," and not to abuse your indulgence as a license to sin, but to remember the Lord's words: "See, you have been made well; sin no more, so that nothing worse happens to you." All this saving health they try to kill when they say, "The cause of your sinning is fixed in the heavens, and cannot be avoided," and "Venus did this, or Saturn, or Mars"—so that, naturally, a human being, flesh and blood and proud corruption, may be without fault, and the creator and ruler of the heavens and the stars may take the blame.[2] And who is this but our God, the sweetness and source of justice, who will repay each according to his works, and does not spurn a broken and humbled heart?

4.3.5 There was at that time a shrewd man, highly skilled in the art of medicine and very distinguished in it, who as proconsul had with his own hand placed that contest crown on my unsound head—but not as a physician. For of that disease you are the healer, who resist the proud but give grace to the humble. Yet did you fail me even through that old man, or stop healing my soul?[3] I had become fairly close to him, and I hung constantly and attentively on his conversation, which, though without verbal polish, was delightful and weighty for the liveli-

2 Psalm 41:4; John 5:14. The Latin calls astrologers *mathematici*, "mathematicians."
3 Vindicianus, proconsul of Africa around AD 380, whom Augustine names in Book VII.

ness of its thought. When he learned from our talk that I was devoted to books of horoscopes, he advised me kindly, like a father, to throw them away and not to waste on that vanity the care and effort that useful things require. He said he had studied that art himself, so thoroughly that in his early years he had wanted to make it the profession by which he earned his living; and if he could understand Hippocrates, he could certainly understand those writings too. Yet he had later abandoned them and taken up medicine for no other reason than that he had found them utterly false, and as a serious man he did not want to earn his living by deceiving people. "But you," he said, "have rhetoric to support you in the world; you pursue this deception out of free interest, not from need to support your household.[4] So you should believe me about it all the more, since I worked to learn it so thoroughly that I meant to live by it alone." When I asked him what, then, made so many true predictions come out of it, he answered as best he could that it was chance, spread everywhere throughout the natural world. For if someone happens to consult the pages of some poet who sings of and intends something quite different, and a line often comes out that fits the matter at hand wonderfully well, he said it was no wonder if a human soul, by some higher prompting and without knowing what was happening within it, by chance and not by skill, should sound out something that chimed with the affairs and actions of the one asking.

4.3.6 This you provided for me from him, or through him, and you sketched in my memory what I would later search out for myself. But at that time neither he nor dearest Nebridius, a very good and very chaste young man, who laughed at that whole business of divination, could persuade me to give these things up. For the authority of their authors moved me more, and I had not yet found any certain proof, of the kind I was looking for, to show me beyond doubt that the true things said by those who

4 Hippocrates (5th century BC), the Greek physician regarded as the founder of medicine.

were consulted were said by luck or lot, not by the art of reading the stars.[5]

THE DEATH OF A FRIEND

Augustine's closest friend is baptized, dies of fever, and leaves him devastated by grief.

4.4.7 In those years, when I had first begun teaching in the town where I was born, I had gained a friend, made very dear through our shared studies, of my own age and blooming, as I was, in the bloom of youth. He had grown up with me as a boy; we had gone to school together and played together. But as a boy he was not yet a friend in the way he now became—though even now not in the way that true friendship is. For friendship is not true unless you bind it together among those who cleave to one another, through the love poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. Yet it was very sweet, ripened by the warmth of shared pursuits. For I had turned him away from the true faith, which as a young man he did not hold genuinely and deeply, toward those superstitious and destructive fables for which my mother wept over me. Now this man was wandering with me in mind, and my soul could not be without him.[6] And look—you, who press close on the backs of those who run from you, God of vengeance and at the same time fountain of mercies, who turn us to yourself in wonderful ways—look, you took the man from this life when he had barely completed a year of friendship with me, a friendship sweeter to me than all the sweetnesses of that life of mine.

4.4.8 Who can count up your praises, even those one person has experienced in himself alone? What did you do then, my God, and how unsearchable is the abyss of your judgments! When he was suffering from fever, he lay for a long time unconscious in a deathly sweat, and when his life was despaired of, he was bap-

5 Nebridius, a close friend from Carthage, later joined Augustine in Milan and appears again in Books VI–IX.
6 Romans 5:5.

tized without knowing it. I did not care, assuming that his soul would keep what it had received from me rather than what was being done to his unconscious body. But it was quite otherwise. For he revived and recovered, and at once, as soon as I could speak with him—and I could as soon as he could, since I never left his side and we depended so much on each other—I tried to mock, in front of him, the baptism he had received when he was utterly absent in mind and senses, assuming he would mock it with me. But by now he had learned that he had received it. But he recoiled from me as from an enemy, and with astonishing and sudden frankness he warned me that if I wanted to be his friend, I must stop saying such things to him. Stunned and shaken, I held back all my impulses until he should recover and be strong enough in health for me to deal with him as I wished. But he was snatched away from my madness, to be kept safe with you for my consolation. A few days later, while I was away, the fever came back and he died.

4.4.9 With this grief my heart was plunged into darkness, and whatever I looked at was death. My hometown was a torment to me, and my father's house a strange misery; whatever I had shared with him had turned, without him, into monstrous torture. My eyes looked for him everywhere, and he was not given to them. I hated everything, because nothing had him, and nothing could say to me now, "Look, he's coming," as when he was alive but away. I had become a great question to myself, and I kept asking my soul why it was sad and why it troubled me so much, and it had no answer to give me. And if I said, "Hope in God," it rightly did not obey, because the dear friend it had lost was a truer and better human being than the phantasm it was told to hope in. Only weeping was sweet to me, and it had taken my friend's place among the delights of my mind.[7]

4.5.10 And now, Lord, all that has passed, and time has softened my wound. May I hear from you, who are truth, and bring the ear of my heart close to your mouth, so that you may tell me why weeping is sweet to the wretched? Or have you, though you

7 Psalm 42:5.

are present everywhere, flung our misery far away from you? Do you remain in yourself, while we are tossed about in our trials? And yet unless we wept into your ears, nothing would be left of our hope. Where, then, does it come from, this sweet fruit plucked from the bitterness of life—groaning and weeping and sighing and lamenting? Is it sweet because we hope that you hear us? That is true of prayers, since they carry a longing to reach you. But is it so in grief for something lost, and in the mourning in which I was then wrapped? For I did not hope that he would come back to life, nor was that what I asked for with my tears; I only grieved and wept. For I was wretched, and I had lost my joy. Or is weeping, too, a bitter thing, which gives us pleasure only out of disgust for the things we once enjoyed, at the moment when we recoil from them?

4.6.11 But why do I say all this? Now is not the time for asking questions but for confessing to you. I was wretched—and wretched is every mind bound by friendship to mortal things. It is torn to pieces when it loses them, and then it feels the wretchedness that made it wretched even before it lost them. That is how I was at that time. I wept most bitterly, and I found my rest in bitterness. So wretched was I, and yet I held that wretched life itself dearer than my friend. For though I wished to change it, I was even less willing to lose it than I had been to lose him; and I do not know whether I would have been willing to lose it even for him, as is told of Orestes and Pylades—if the story is not made up—who were willing to die for each other, or together, since for them not to live together was worse than death.[8] But in me some feeling had arisen that was the very opposite of this: a crushing weariness of living, and a fear of dying. I think that the more I loved him, the more I hated and feared death, which had taken him from me, as the cruelest of enemies; and I thought it would suddenly devour all people, since it had been able to take him. That is exactly how I was; I remember. Here is my heart, my God; here it is, within. See, for I

8 Orestes and Pylades: heroes of Greek legend, proverbial for their devoted friendship.

remember, my hope—you who cleanse me from the uncleanness of such feelings, turning my eyes toward you and plucking my feet from the snare. For I was amazed that other mortals were alive, since he whom I had loved as if he would never die was dead; and I was even more amazed that I, who was his other self, was alive when he was dead. Someone put it well when he called his friend "half of his soul."[9] For I felt that my soul and his had been one soul in two bodies. That is why life was a horror to me: I did not want to live as half a person. And perhaps that is also why I was afraid to die—so that he whom I had loved so much should not die entirely.

4.7.12 What madness, not to know how to love human beings as human beings! What a foolish man, to suffer the human lot without any measure! That is what I was then. And so I seethed, I sighed, I wept, I was distraught; I had neither rest nor any counsel. For I was carrying my soul, torn and bleeding, which would not bear to be carried by me, and I could not find anywhere to set it down. Not in pleasant groves, not in games and songs, not in sweet-scented places, not in lavish banquets, not in the pleasures of the bedroom and the bed, not even, finally, in books and poetry did it find rest. Everything filled me with horror, even the light itself. Whatever was not what he was seemed vile and hateful—except groaning and tears, for in them alone was there some little rest. But whenever my soul was drawn away from them, a great load of misery weighed me down. It should have been lifted up to you, Lord, to be healed; I knew that. But I neither wanted to nor was able to, all the more because when I thought of you, you were nothing solid or firm to me. For it was not you, but an empty phantom, and my error was my god. If I tried to set my soul down there to rest, it slid through the void and came crashing back down on me, and I remained for myself an unhappy place, where I could neither stay nor get away. For where could my heart flee from my heart? Where could I flee from myself? Where would I not follow myself? And yet I did flee from my hometown. For my eyes

9 The poet Horace, speaking of his friend Virgil (Odes 1.3.8).

would look for him less where they were not used to seeing him. And so I came from the town of Thagaste to Carthage.

CONSOLATION IN FRIENDS

Time and the company of friends gradually ease Augustine's grief.

4.8.13 Times are not idle, nor do they roll by to no effect through our senses: they work wonders in the mind. See, they came and went, day after day, and by coming and going they planted in me other hopes and other memories. Little by little they patched me up again with my old kinds of pleasure, and that grief of mine gave way before them. What took its place were not, indeed, new griefs, but the causes of new griefs. For why had that grief pierced me so easily and so deeply, if not because I had poured out my soul onto the sand by loving someone who was going to die as though he would never die? What most restored and revived me was the comfort of other friends, with whom I loved what I went on to love: and that was a huge fable and a long lie, by whose adulterous caress our mind, itching in its ears, was corrupted. But that fable did not die for me whenever one of my friends died.[10] There were other things in their company that captured my mind more fully: talking and laughing together, doing each other kindnesses in turn, reading delightfully written books together, joking together and being serious together, disagreeing now and then without resentment, as a person does with himself, and seasoning our many agreements with those very rare disagreements; teaching each other something, or learning from each other; missing the absent with an ache, and welcoming them back with joy. By these and similar signs, which spring from the hearts of those who love and are loved in return and show themselves through the mouth, the tongue, the eyes, and a thousand delightful gestures, our minds were set ablaze as if by kindling, and out of many we were made one.

10 The "fable" is the Manichee mythology that Augustine and his friends then believed.

4.9.14 This is what is loved in friends, and loved so much that a person's conscience feels guilty if he does not love one who loves him, or does not return the love of one who loves him, seeking nothing from the other's body but signs of goodwill. Hence the mourning when someone dies, the darkness of grief, the heart drenched as sweetness turns to bitterness, and, from the lost life of the dying, the death of the living. Happy is the one who loves you, and his friend in you, and his enemy for your sake. For he alone loses no one dear to him to whom all are dear in the one who is never lost. And who is that but our God, the God who made heaven and earth and fills them, because by filling them he made them? No one loses you except one who leaves you; and in leaving you, where does he go, where does he flee, except from you at peace to you in anger? For where does he not find your law in his own punishment? And your law is truth, and truth is you.

LOVING WHAT PASSES

Augustine urges the soul to love passing things in God rather than resting in them.

4.10.15 "God of hosts, turn us back and show us your face, and we shall be saved." For wherever the human soul turns, anywhere but to you, it is fastened to sorrows, even if it is fastened to beautiful things outside you and outside itself. Yet these would be nothing at all if they were not from you. They rise and they set: by rising they begin, as it were, to be; they grow toward completion; and once complete, they grow old and perish. Not all things grow old, but all things perish. So when they rise and strive toward being, the faster they grow in order to be, the more they hurry toward not being. Such is their measure. This much you have given them, because they are parts of things that do not all exist at once, but by passing away and succeeding one another they all together make up the universe of which they are parts. (See, this is how our speech too is accomplished,

through sounding signs.[11] For a speech will not be whole unless each word, once it has sounded its parts, gives way so that another may follow.) Let my soul praise you for these things, O God, "creator of all things," but let it not be glued to them by love through the senses of the body. For they go where they were going, toward not being, and they tear the soul apart with pestilent desires, since it wants to be, and loves to rest in the things it loves. But in them there is nowhere to rest, because they do not stand still: they flee, and who can follow them with the sense of the flesh? Or who can grasp them, even when they are at hand? For the sense of the flesh is slow, because it is the sense of the flesh: that is its measure. It is sufficient for the other purpose for which it was made, but it is not sufficient for this: to hold on to things that run past, from their appointed beginning to their appointed end.[12] For in your Word, through whom they are created, there they hear: "From here" and "this far."[13]

4.11.16 Do not be vain, my soul, and do not let the ear of your heart be deafened by the din of your vanity. You too, listen: the Word himself calls you to return, and there is the place of undisturbed quiet, where love is not abandoned if it does not itself abandon. See, those things pass away so that others may take their place, and so that the lowest level of the universe may be made up of all its parts. "But do I ever go away anywhere?" says the Word of God. Make your dwelling there; entrust to it whatever you have from there, my soul—at least now that you are worn out with deceptions. Entrust to the truth whatever you have from the truth, and you will lose nothing: what has rotted in you will blossom again, all your sicknesses will be healed, what is fleeting in you will be reshaped and renewed and bound fast to you. It will not drag you down to where it descends, but will stand with you and remain with you before God, who always stands and remains.

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11 Psalm 80:7.

12 "Deus, creator omnium" ("God, creator of all things"), the opening of a hymn by Ambrose.

13 Echoing Job 38:11, where God sets limits to the sea.

4.11.17 Why, turned the wrong way, do you follow your flesh? Let it follow you, once you have turned back. Whatever you sense through it is partial; you do not know the whole of which these are parts, and yet they delight you. But if the sense of your flesh were capable of grasping the whole—if it had not, as your just punishment, itself been given a limited place as a part of the universe—you would want whatever exists in the present to pass away, so that the whole might please you more. For what we say, too, you hear through that same sense of the flesh, and you certainly do not want the syllables to stand still, but to fly past, so that others may come and you may hear the whole. So it always is with all the things that make up a single whole (and the things that make it up do not all exist at once): all of them together delight us more than each one singly, if all of them could be perceived. But far better than these is the one who made all things. He is our God, and he does not pass away, because nothing takes his place.

4.12.18 If bodies please you, praise God for them, and turn your love back upon their maker, so that in the things that please you, you do not displease him. If souls please you, let them be loved in God, because they too are changeable, and only when fixed in him do they stand firm; otherwise they would go their way and perish. So let them be loved in him. Carry off to him with you as many as you can, and say to them: Let us love him. He made these things, and he is not far away. For he did not make them and then go away: they are from him and in him. See where he is: wherever truth is tasted. He is innermost in the heart, but the heart has wandered away from him. Return to your heart, you transgressors, and cling to him who made you. Stand with him and you will stand; rest in him and you will be at rest. Where are you going, into these rough places? Where are you going?[14] The good you love is from him; but only insofar as it is directed toward him is it good and sweet. Otherwise it will rightly turn bitter, because whatever comes from him is wrongly loved if he is abandoned. Why do you still go on and on

14 "Return to your heart, you transgressors": Isaiah 46:8.

walking these hard and toilsome roads? There is no rest where you are looking for it. Seek what you seek, but it is not where you seek it. You seek the happy life in the land of death: it is not there. For how can there be a happy life where there is not even life?

4.12.19 Our very Life came down here and took on our death and killed it out of the abundance of his own life. And he thundered, calling us to return from here to him, into that secret place from which he came forth to us—first into the virgin womb, where human nature, mortal flesh, was wedded to him, so that it might not be mortal forever. And from there, "like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, he rejoiced like a giant to run his course." For he did not delay, but ran, calling out by his words, his deeds, his death, his life, his descent, his ascent—calling us to return to him. And he departed from our sight, so that we might return to him. And he departed from our sight, so that we might return to our heart and find him there. For he went away, and see, he is here. He did not want to stay with us long, and yet he has not left us.[15] For he went away to the place he never left, because the world was made through him, and he was in this world, and he came into this world to save sinners. To him my soul confesses, and he heals it, for it has sinned against him. Children of men, how long will you be heavy of heart? Even now that Life has come down, do you not want to go up and live? But where can you go up, when you are already on high and have set your mouth in the heavens? Come down, so that you may go up—go up to God. For you fell by going up against God. Tell them this, so that they may weep in the valley of weeping, and so carry them off with you to God; for it is by his Spirit that you say these things to them, if you say them burning with the fire of love.[16]

15 Psalm 19:5.

16 Echoing John 1:10, 1 Timothy 1:15, and Psalms 4:2, 73:9 and 84:6.

ON THE BEAUTIFUL AND THE FITTING

Augustine recalls writing a book on beauty and fitness while still picturing God as a body.

4.13.20 At that time I did not know these things. I loved lower beauties, and I was sinking into the depths. I used to say to my friends: "Do we love anything except what is beautiful? What, then, is the beautiful? And what is beauty? What is it that draws us to the things we love and wins us over to them? For unless there were grace and form in them, they could in no way move us toward themselves." And I noticed and saw that in bodies themselves there was one thing that is, as it were, a whole, and beautiful for that reason, and another that is fitting because it is well suited to something else, as a part of the body is to the body as a whole, or a shoe to a foot, and so on. This reflection welled up in my mind from the depths of my heart, and I wrote books *On the Beautiful and the Fitting*—two or three, I think. You know, God; it has slipped my memory.[17] For we no longer have them; they have strayed away from us, I do not know how.

4.14.21 But what moved me, Lord my God, to dedicate those books to Hierius, an orator of the city of Rome? I did not know him by sight, but I had come to love the man for his reputation for learning, which was brilliant; and I had heard some of his sayings, and they had pleased me. But he pleased me more because he pleased others, who extolled him with praise, astonished that a Syrian, first trained in Greek eloquence, had afterward become a wonderful speaker in Latin too, and was deeply learned in the subjects that belong to the pursuit of wisdom. A man is praised, and is loved though absent. Does that love pass from the mouth of the one who praises into the heart of the one who hears? Not at all! Rather, one lover sets another on fire. For this is why someone who is praised is loved: when we believe he

17 Augustine's first book, written around AD 380; it has not survived.

is being extolled by a heart that does not deceive—that is, when the one who praises him loves him.[18]

4.14.22 For that is how I loved people then: by the judgment of people, not by yours, my God, in whom no one is deceived. And yet why was it not the way one loves a famous charioteer, or a beast-hunter in the arena celebrated by the enthusiasm of the crowd, but very differently, seriously, and in the way I would want to be praised myself? For I would not want to be praised and loved as actors are—though I myself praised and loved them—but would rather remain unknown than be famous like that, and even be hated rather than loved like that. Where in a single soul are these weights of so many different kinds of love distributed? What is it that I love in another, which in turn, unless I hated it, I would not reject and repel from myself, since each of us is a human being? For it is not like a good horse, loved by someone who would not want to be a horse even if he could. The same must be said of an actor, who shares our nature. Do I then love in a human being what I would hate to be, though I am a human being? A human being is a great deep. You, Lord, have even his hairs numbered, and not one of them is lost in you; and yet his hairs are easier to count than his feelings and the movements of his heart.

4.14.23 But that rhetorician was the kind of man I loved in such a way that I wanted to be like him. I was straying, puffed up with conceit, carried about by every wind, and all the while I was being steered by you, but very secretly. How do I know, and how can I confess to you with certainty, that I loved him more because of the love of those who praised him than for the things for which he was praised? Because if those same people, instead of praising him, had criticized him, and in criticizing and scorning him had told the very same things, I would not have been kindled or stirred toward him. Yet the facts would not have been different, nor the man himself; only the feelings of those who told about him. See where the weak soul lies when it does not yet cling to the solidity of truth: as the breezes of talk blow from

18 Hierius: a rhetorician otherwise unknown.

the breasts of those who hold opinions, so it is carried and turned, twisted and twisted back, and the light is clouded over for it and the truth is not seen—and yet, look, it is right in front of us. And it seemed a great thing to me that my writing and my studies should become known to that man. If he approved of them, I would burn all the more; if he disapproved, my heart, vain and empty of your solidity, would be wounded. And yet that beautiful and fitting, the subject on which I had written to him, I gladly turned over in my mind before the eyes of my contemplation, and admired it though no one joined me in praising it.

4.15.24 But I did not yet see the hinge on which so great a matter turns in your craftsmanship, Almighty, who alone do wonders. My mind moved among bodily forms. I defined and distinguished the beautiful, as what is so in itself, and the fitting, as what is becoming because it is suited to something else, and I supported this with bodily examples. And I turned to the nature of the mind, but the false opinion I held about spiritual things would not let me see the truth. The very force of truth burst into my eyes, and I turned my throbbing mind away from incorporeal reality toward lines and colors and swelling magnitudes; and because I could not see these in the mind, I thought I could not see the mind. In virtue I loved peace, and in vice I hated discord, and so I observed in the one a unity and in the other a kind of division. In that unity, it seemed to me, lay the rational mind and the nature of truth and of the highest good. In this division, poor wretch that I was, I supposed there was some substance of irrational life, the nature of the highest evil—something that was not only a substance but actually alive, and yet was not from you, my God, from whom all things are. And I called the former a "monad" [oneness], as if it were a mind without any sex, and the latter a "dyad" [twoness]—anger in crimes of violence, lust in shameful acts—not knowing what I was saying. For I had not known or learned that evil is not any kind of substance, nor that our own mind is not the highest and unchangeable good.

4.15.25 For just as there are crimes of violence when that movement of the mind in which impulse resides is corrupt and throws itself about insolently and turbulently, and shameful acts when that affection of the soul by which carnal pleasures are drunk in is unrestrained, so errors and false opinions defile life when the rational mind itself is corrupt. So it was in me then, for I did not know that it must be illuminated by another light in order to share in the truth, since it is not itself the nature of truth. For "you will light my lamp, Lord; my God, you will lighten my darkness," and of your fullness we have all received. For you are the true light that enlightens everyone who comes into this world, because in you there is no change, nor the shadow of a moment's turning.[19]

4.15.26 But I was straining toward you and being driven back by you, so that I might taste death, because you resist the proud. And what could be prouder than to claim, in amazing madness, that I was by nature what you are? For though I was changeable—and this was plain to me from the very fact that I wanted to become wise, so as to become better instead of worse—I still preferred to think that you too were changeable rather than that I was not what you are. So I was driven back, and you resisted my stiff and windy neck. I imagined bodily forms; flesh myself, I blamed the flesh; a wandering spirit, I did not return to you. Wandering, I wandered into things that do not exist—not in you, nor in me, nor in any body. They were not created for me by your truth; they were invented by my vanity out of bodies. And I would say to your little ones, your faithful, my fellow citizens, from whom I was unknowingly in exile—I would say to them, chattering and foolish: "Why then does the soul that God made go astray?" But I did not want anyone to say to me, "Why then does God go astray?" And I would argue that your unchangeable substance had been forced to go astray, rather than confess that my changeable substance had strayed of its own accord and was going astray as a punishment.

4.15.27 I was about twenty-six or twenty-seven years old when I wrote those volumes. I was turning over in myself bodily fictions that clattered in the ears of my heart—ears that I was straining, sweet truth, toward your inner melody, as I thought about the beautiful and the fitting. I longed to stand and hear you, and to rejoice with joy at the bridegroom's voice, and I could not, because I was dragged outside by the voices of my error, and by the weight of my pride I kept falling to the depths. For you did not give joy and gladness to my hearing, nor did my bones rejoice, for they had not been humbled.[20]

4.16.28 And what good did it do me that when I was about twenty, and some writings of Aristotle came into my hands—the ones they call the *Ten Categories*—I read them by myself and understood them? At their very name, when my teacher, the rhetorician of Carthage, and others who were considered learned spoke of them with cheeks puffed and crackling with conceit, I used to gape in suspense, as if at something great and divine. When I compared notes with people who said they had barely understood them with the help of very learned teachers—who not only explained them aloud but drew many diagrams in the sand—they could tell me nothing more than I had learned reading alone by myself.[21] They seemed to me to speak clearly enough about substances, such as a human being, and about what is in them: a human being's shape, what it is like; his stature, how many feet tall he is; his relationship, whose brother he is; or where he is placed, or when he was born; whether he is standing or sitting, has shoes on or is armed; whether he is doing something or having something done to him—and all the countless things found in these nine classes, of which I have given some examples, or in the class of substance itself.

4.16.29 What good did this do me, when it actually did me harm? For I thought that absolutely everything that exists was con-

19 Psalm 18:28; then John 1:16 and 1:9.
20 Echoing John 3:29 and Psalm 51:8.
21 Aristotle's *Categories*, a basic text of logic that lists ten classes of things that can be said about anything.

tained in those ten categories, and so I tried to understand you too, my God, who are wonderfully simple and unchangeable, as if you too were the subject of your greatness or your beauty, so that these were in you as in a subject, as they are in a body. But your greatness and your beauty are you yourself, whereas a body is not great and beautiful by being a body, since even if it were less great and less beautiful, it would still be a body. What I thought about you was falsehood, not truth: figments of my misery, not the foundations of your blessedness. For you had commanded, and so it was happening in me, that the earth should bring forth thorns and thistles for me, and that I should come to my bread only by toil.[22]

4.16.30 And what good did it do me that I, at that time the most worthless slave of evil cravings, read by myself and understood all the books I could get hold of on the arts they call liberal? I delighted in them, and I did not know where whatever was true and certain in them came from. For I had my back to the light and my face toward the things that are lit, so that my face itself, with which I saw the things that were lit, was not itself lit. Whatever there was on the art of speaking and of reasoning, on the dimensions of figures, on music and on numbers, I understood without great difficulty and with no one teaching me. You know, Lord my God, that quickness of understanding and sharpness of discernment are your gift. But I did not offer them to you in sacrifice. And so they served not for my benefit but rather for my ruin, because I took pains to keep so good a portion of my substance in my own power; and I did not keep my strength for you, but went away from you into a far country to squander it on wanton cravings. For what good was a good thing to me, when I did not use it well? I did not realize that those arts were very hard to understand even for studious and talented people until I tried to explain them to such people; and the most outstanding among them was the one who was not too slow in following my explanations.

4.16.31 But what good did it do me, when I thought that you, Lord God, Truth, were a vast luminous body, and I a fragment of that body? What extreme perversity! But that is how I was. And I do not blush, my God, to confess to you your mercies toward me and to call upon you—I who did not blush then to profess my blasphemies before people and to bark against you. What good, then, was a mind nimble in those disciplines, and all those knotty books unknotted without the help of any human teacher, when I was going astray, in shameful and sacrilegious ugliness, in the teaching of godliness? Or what great harm did a much slower mind do to your little ones, since they did not go far from you, so that in the nest of your church they might grow their feathers in safety and nourish the wings of love on the food of sound faith? O Lord our God, let us hope in the shelter of your wings: protect us and carry us. You will carry us, you will carry us when we are little, and right up to our gray hairs you will carry us. For our strength, when it is you, is strength; but when it is our own, it is weakness. Our good lives forever with you, and because we have turned away from it, we have turned awry. Let us turn back now, Lord, so that we are not overturned; for our good lives with you without any failing, and that good is you yourself. And we do not fear that there will be nowhere to return to just because we fell from there. Our house does not fall in our absence: it is your eternity.[23]

22 Genesis 3:18–19.
23 Echoing Isaiah 46:4.

Book V

Faustus, Rome, and Milan: meeting Ambrose
Disappointed by Faustus, Augustine moves to Rome, then Milan, where he hears Ambrose.

5.1.1 Accept the sacrifice of my confessions from the hand of my tongue, which you formed and stirred up to confess your name; heal all my bones, and let them say, "Lord, who is like you?" For one who confesses to you does not teach you what is happening inside him, because a closed heart does not shut out your eye, nor does human hardness push away your hand. You loosen it when you will, whether in mercy or in punishment, and there is no one who can hide from your heat. But let my soul praise you so that it may love you, and let it confess your mercies to you so that it may praise you.[1] Your whole creation never ceases or falls silent in your praise: every human spirit praises you through its mouth turned toward you, and animals and physical things through the mouths of those who contemplate them. So our soul may rise up to you out of its weariness, leaning on the things you have made and passing beyond them to you, who made them so wonderfully. And there is refreshment and true strength.

5.2.2 Let the restless and the wicked go and flee from you. You see them, and you mark out the shadows; and look, all things are beautiful with them, while they themselves are ugly. And what harm have they done you? Or in what way have they dishonored your rule, which is just and whole from the heavens

1 Psalm 35:10.

down to the lowest things? For where did they flee when they fled from your face? Or where do you not find them? But they fled so as not to see you who see them, and so that, blinded, they might stumble against you—for you abandon nothing that you have made—so that the unjust might stumble against you and be justly punished, withdrawing from your gentleness, stumbling against your uprightness, and falling upon your severity. Evidently they do not know that you are everywhere, you whom no place contains, and that you alone are present even to those who go far from you. Let them turn back, then, and seek you, because you have not abandoned your creation as they abandoned their creator. Let them turn back, and see, you are there in their heart—in the heart of those who confess to you and throw themselves upon you and weep in your lap after their hard journeys. And you gently wipe away their tears, and they weep all the more and rejoice in their weeping, because it is you, Lord—not some human being of flesh and blood, but you, Lord, who made them—who remake and comfort them. And where was I when I was seeking you? You were right in front of me, but I had gone away even from myself and could not find myself—how much less could I find you!

FAUSTUS

The famous Manichee Faustus reaches Carthage, but proves charming and unlearned, loosening Augustine's attachment to the sect.

5.3.3 Let me set out, in the sight of my God, that twenty-ninth year of my life. A certain bishop of the Manichees had come to Carthage, Faustus by name, a great snare of the devil, and many were entangled in it through the lure of his smooth eloquence. Although I too praised that eloquence, I nonetheless distinguished it from the truth of the things I was eager to learn; I was looking not at the dish in which his speech was served, but at what food of knowledge this Faustus, so celebrated among them, would set before me to eat. For his reputation had told me in advance that he was highly skilled in every respectable

branch of learning and especially well versed in the liberal arts. And since I had read a great deal of the philosophers and kept it committed to memory, I compared some of their teachings with those long myths of the Manichees. What seemed more probable to me was what had been said by those who were capable enough to be able to assess the world, even though they never found its Lord.[2] For you are great, Lord, and you look upon the lowly, but the lofty you know from afar. You draw near only to the crushed in heart, and you are not found by the proud—not even if with curious skill they count the stars and the sand, measure out the regions of the sky, and track the paths of the heavenly bodies.

5.3.4 For they search out these things with their own minds and with the intelligence you gave them, and they have discovered much, and predicted many years in advance eclipses of the sun and moon—on what day, at what hour, and how great a part would be eclipsed—and their calculation has not deceived them. It turned out just as they predicted. They wrote down the rules they had worked out, and these are read today; and from them it is predicted in what year, in what month of the year, on what day of the month, at what hour of the day, and to what extent of its light the moon or the sun will be eclipsed: and it will happen as predicted. People who do not know these things marvel and are astounded, and those who do know them exult and are lifted up. Through impious pride they draw back from your light and suffer their own eclipse: they foresee an eclipse of the sun so long in advance, yet do not see their own in the present (for they do not ask in a spirit of devotion where they got the intelligence with which they investigate these things). And when they find that you made them, they do not give themselves to you, so that you may preserve what you made; nor do they sacrifice to you what they have made of themselves—slaughtering their soaring pride like the birds, their curiosity like the fish of the sea, with which they travel the hidden paths of the deep, and their self-

2 Faustus of Milevis in North Africa, a Manichee bishop famous in the sect as a speaker.

indulgence like the beasts of the field—so that you, God, a devouring fire, may consume their dead cares and re-create them to live forever.[3]

5.3.5 But they have not known the way, your Word, through whom you made the things they count, and the people who count them, and the sense by which they perceive what they count, and the mind with which they count; and of your wisdom there is no counting. But the only-begotten himself was made for us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification; he was counted among us, and he paid tribute to Caesar. They have not known this way, by which they might come down from themselves to him and through him go up to him. They have not known this way, and they think themselves lofty and shining among the stars; and look, they have fallen to the earth, and their foolish heart has been darkened.[4] They say many true things about the creation, yet they do not seek the Truth, the creation's maker, with reverence, and so they do not find him. Or if they do find him, "though they know God, they do not honor him as God or give thanks, but become futile in their thinking," and they call themselves wise, attributing to themselves what is yours. And so, with the most perverse blindness, they strive to attribute to you what is theirs—heaping lies, that is, on you, who are the Truth—"exchanging the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the likeness of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed beasts and serpents." They "turn your truth into a lie, and worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator."[5]

5.3.6 Still, I kept hold of many true things they had said about the creation itself. Their reasoning made sense to me, confirmed by calculation, by the order of the seasons, and by the visible testimony of the stars. I compared it with the sayings of Mani, who wrote a great deal on these subjects, raving at enormous length; and in him I found no account that made sense of the

3 Echoing Psalm 8:7–8 and Deuteronomy 4:24.
4 Echoing Psalm 147:5, 1 Corinthians 1:30, Isaiah 53:12 and Matthew 17:24–27.
5 Romans 1:21–25.

solstices and equinoxes, or of eclipses, or of anything of the kind I had learned in the books of secular wisdom. There, though, I was ordered to believe; and what I was told did not square with the accounts I had tested by calculation and with my own eyes, but was far different.[6]

5.4.7 Lord God of truth, does anyone who knows these things please you just for that? Unhappy is the person who knows all of them but does not know you; happy is the one who knows you, even if he does not know them. And whoever knows both you and them is not happier because of them; he is happy because of you alone—if, knowing you, he glorifies you as you are and gives thanks, and does not become futile in his thinking. Consider someone who knows how to own a tree and thanks you for the use of it, though he may not know how many cubits tall it is or how wide it spreads. He is better off than someone who measures it and counts all its branches but neither owns it nor knows or loves its Creator. In the same way, the faithful person—to whom the whole world of riches belongs, and who, "as having nothing, yet possesses all things" by clinging to you, whom all things serve—even if he does not know so much as the circuits of the Great Bear, is certainly better; it is foolish to doubt it. He is better than one who measures the heavens and counts the stars and weighs the elements, yet neglects you, who "have arranged all things by measure and number and weight."[7]

5.5.8 But who asked some Mani or other to write about these things too, when piety could be learned without any expertise in them? For you said to humankind, "See: piety is wisdom." He could have been ignorant of that even if he had known these things perfectly; but since he did not know these things, and yet most shamelessly dared to teach them, he could not possibly have known piety. For it is vanity to profess these worldly matters even when one knows them; piety is to confess to you. So, straying from the path, he talked at length about these things,

6 Mani (AD 216–276), the Persian founder of the Manichaean religion to which Augustine then belonged.
7 2 Corinthians 6:10; Wisdom 11:20.

with the result that once he was refuted by those who had truly learned them, it became plain what his understanding was worth in other matters, which are more hidden. For he did not want to be thought little of; he tried to persuade people that the Holy Spirit, the Comforter and Enricher of your faithful, was personally present in him with full authority.[8] So when he was caught having said false things about the sky and the stars and the motions of the sun and moon—even though these things do not belong to religious teaching—his daring was shown clearly enough to be sacrilegious. For he spoke of things he not only did not know but got wrong, and with such crazed and empty pride that he tried to attribute them to himself as to a divine person.

5.5.9 When I hear some Christian brother or other who does not know these things and takes one thing for another, I look patiently on a man holding his opinion. I do not see that it harms him, so long as he believes nothing unworthy of you, Lord, Creator of all things, even if he happens to be ignorant of the position and nature of the physical creation. It does harm him, though, if he thinks this belongs to the very form of the teaching of piety, and dares to assert too stubbornly what he does not know. Yet even such weakness, in the cradle of faith, is supported by Love, our mother, until the new self grows up "to maturity" and can no longer be "carried about by every wind of doctrine."[9] But here was a man who dared to act—as teacher, authority, guide, and leader of those he was persuading—in such a way that his followers believed they were following not just any man but your Holy Spirit. Once he was convicted of saying anything false, who would not judge that such madness should be loathed and cast far away? Yet I had not yet clearly established whether, even on his account, the variations of longer and shorter days and nights, and of night and day themselves, and the eclipses of the lights, and anything else of the kind I had read in other books, could be explained. If by chance they could, it would remain uncertain to me whether things were this way

8 Job 28:28, in the Greek version.
9 Ephesians 4:13–14.

or that; but for the sake of my faith I would set his authority first, because of the holiness I believed he had.

5.6.10 For almost the whole nine years in which, a wanderer in mind, I was their hearer, I had been awaiting the arrival of this Faustus with all too eager longing. The others among them whom I happened to meet, who failed when I put questions about such things to them, kept promising me him: once he came and we talked together, these questions—and any greater ones I might have—would be very easily and very clearly resolved. So when he came, I found a gracious man, pleasant in speech, who chattered the very things they usually say, only much more sweetly. But what use to my thirst was this most elegant server of precious cups? My ears were already sated with such things. They did not seem better to me because they were better said, nor true because eloquent; nor did the soul seem wise because the face was fitting and the speech graceful. Those who had promised him to me were not good judges of things, and so he seemed prudent and wise to them because his speaking delighted them. I had also come across another kind of people who hold even truth suspect and refuse to accept it if it is offered in polished and abundant language. But you, my God, had already taught me, in wonderful and hidden ways—and I believe it was you who taught me, because it is true, and there is no other teacher of truth but you, wherever and from whatever source it shines out. So I had already learned from you that nothing should seem true just because it is eloquently said, nor false because the signs from the lips sound unpolished; nor, again, true because it is roughly expressed, nor false because the language is splendid. Wisdom and folly are like wholesome and unwholesome food; and words, ornate or plain, are like fine city dishes or rustic ones—either food can be served in either.

5.6.11 So my eagerness, with which I had waited for the man so long, was indeed delighted by his energy and feeling in debate, and by the apt words that came readily to clothe his thoughts. I was delighted, and I praised and extolled him along with many others—even more than many. But it annoyed me that in the

crowd of listeners I was not allowed to put my questions to him and share the burden of them in friendly conversation, exchanging talk back and forth. When I was able to, and together with my friends began to claim his attention at a time when a back-and-forth discussion was not out of place, and put forward some things that troubled me, I learned from experience first of all that he had no experience of the liberal arts except grammar, and that only in the ordinary way. He had read some of Cicero's speeches, a very few books of Seneca, some of the poets, and whatever volumes of his own sect were written in good, well-composed Latin; and he had daily practice in speaking. From this came a ready eloquence, made more acceptable and more seductive by a controlled intelligence and a certain natural charm. Is it as I remember, Lord my God, judge of my conscience? My heart and my memory are before you, who were then dealing with me in the hidden secret of your providence, and were already turning my shameful errors before my face, so that I might see them and hate them.[10]

5.7.12 For once he had shown himself clearly enough to be untrained in the arts in which I had thought he excelled, I began to despair that he could open up and resolve the things that troubled me. Someone ignorant of these could still hold the truth of piety—but only if he were not a Manichee. Their books are full of endlessly long fables about the sky and the stars and the sun and the moon. I no longer thought he could explain precisely—as I very much wanted—by comparing them with the mathematical calculations I had read elsewhere, whether things were really as the Manichees' books contained, or at least whether an equally good account could be given from them. When I brought these things forward to be considered and discussed, he was modest enough not to dare to take up the burden. He knew that he did not know these things, and he was not ashamed to admit it. He was not one of those many talkers I had put up with, who tried to teach me these things and said nothing. This man had a heart—not upright toward you, but not too

10 Seneca the Younger (died AD 65), Roman Stoic philosopher and writer.

incautious toward himself either. He was not wholly ignorant of his own ignorance, and he did not want to be cornered by rash debate in a place from which there was no way out and no easy way back. For this, too, I liked him more. The restraint of a mind that confesses is more beautiful than the things I wanted to know. And I found him like this in all the more difficult and subtle questions.

5.7.13 So the zeal I had directed toward Mani's writings was broken, and I despaired still more of their other teachers, since in many of the things that troubled me this famous man had turned out as he did. I began to spend time with him for the sake of his own passion: he was burning for literature, which I was then already teaching to young men as a professor of rhetoric at Carthage. I read with him either what he wanted to hear or what I thought suited to such a mind. For the rest, all my effort to advance in that sect collapsed completely once I had come to know the man. Not that I separated from them entirely; but, as if finding nothing better, I had decided to be content for the time being with what I had somehow blundered into, unless something more worth choosing should happen to shine out. So that Faustus, who was a snare of death to many, had already begun to loosen the snare in which I was caught, neither willing it nor knowing it. For your hands, my God, in the hidden depth of your providence, did not abandon my soul. From the blood of my mother's heart, through her tears day and night, sacrifice was offered to you for me; and you dealt with me in wonderful ways. You did it, my God; for "a person's steps are directed by the Lord, and he will choose his way." Or what provision is there for salvation except your hand, remaking what you have made?[11]

TO ROME

Seeking better-behaved students, Augustine sails for Rome, deceiving Monica and leaving her behind in tears.

5.8.14 So you dealt with me so that I was persuaded to go to Rome and to teach there, rather than at Carthage, what I had been teaching. How I was persuaded I will not fail to confess to you, because in these things too your deepest hidden ways and your mercy, ever present to us, should be pondered and proclaimed. I did not want to go to Rome because the friends who urged it promised greater earnings and greater standing—though these things too drew my mind at the time. The greatest reason, almost the only one, was that I heard that young men there studied more quietly and were kept in check by a more orderly discipline: they did not rush wildly and insolently into the school of a teacher who was not their own, and were not admitted at all unless he allowed it. At Carthage, by contrast, the students' license is disgraceful and unrestrained. They burst in shamelessly and, looking almost frenzied, disrupt the order each teacher has set up for his pupils' progress. They commit many outrages with astonishing stupidity, acts that would be punished by law if custom did not protect them. This shows them all the more wretched: they do, as if it were allowed, what by your eternal law will never be allowed, and they think they do it with impunity, when they are punished by the very blindness of doing it, and suffer incomparably worse than they inflict. So the behavior I refused to make my own when I was a student, I was forced to endure in others when I was a teacher. And so I was glad to go where everyone who knew said such things did not happen. But it was you, "my hope and my portion in the land of the living," who, so that I would change my place on earth for the salvation of my soul, applied goads at Carthage to tear me away from there and set allurements before me at Rome to draw me there. You did it through people who love a life that is death

11 Psalm 37:23.

—here doing insane things, there promising empty ones—and to correct my steps you secretly made use of both their perversity and mine. For those who disturbed my peace were blinded by a disgraceful frenzy, and those who invited me elsewhere had a taste for earthly things; while I, detesting real misery here, was seeking false happiness there.[12]

5.8.15 But why I was leaving here and going there, you knew, God, and you did not reveal it to me or to my mother, who wept bitterly at my going and followed me all the way to the sea. But I deceived her as she clung to me with all her strength, determined either to call me back or to come with me. I pretended I did not want to leave a friend until the wind rose and he could sail. And I lied to my mother—and to such a mother! And I got away. For this too you mercifully forgave me, keeping me, full of detestable filth, safe from the waters of the sea for the water of your grace; once I was washed in it, the rivers would dry from my mother's eyes, with which every day she watered the ground beneath her face before you for my sake. Still, since she refused to go back without me, I barely persuaded her to stay that night in a place close to our ship, a shrine to blessed Cyprian.[13] But that night I slipped away secretly, and she did not; she stayed, praying and weeping. And what was she asking of you, my God, with so many tears, except that you would not let me sail? But you, taking deep counsel and hearing the very core of her longing, did not heed what she was asking then, so that you might make me what she was always asking. The wind blew and filled our sails and took the shore from our sight; and on that shore, in the morning, she was wild with grief, filling your ears with complaints and groans. You disregarded them, since you were sweeping me away by my own cravings to put an end to those very cravings, and her fleshly longing was being whipped by the just scourge of sorrow. For she loved to have me with her, as mothers do, but far more than many; and she did not know what

12 Psalm 142:5.

13 Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, martyred in AD 258; his shrine stood by the harbor.

joys you were going to make for her out of my absence. She did not know; so she wept and wailed, and those torments exposed in her what remained of Eve, seeking with groaning what she had brought forth with groaning. And yet, after accusing me of deceit and cruelty, she turned again to pray to you for me and went back to her usual life, and I went to Rome.[14]

FEVER IN ROME

Augustine falls gravely ill in Rome, still unbaptized, and recovers through God's mercy and Monica's prayers.

5.9.16 And look—there I was met by the scourge of bodily sickness, and I was already on my way to the underworld, carrying all the evils I had committed against you, against myself, and against others: many and grievous, on top of the bond of original sin by which "in Adam we all die." For you had not forgiven me any of them in Christ, nor had he undone on his cross the enmities I had contracted with you by my sins. How could he undo them on the cross of a phantom, which is what I had believed of him? As false as the death of his flesh seemed to me, so real was the death of my soul; and as real as the death of his flesh was, so false was the life of my soul, which did not believe it. And as the fevers grew worse, I was going, I was perishing. For where would I have gone, had I left this world then, except into fire and the torments my deeds deserved, in the truth of your order?[15] She did not know this, yet she was praying for me in her absence; and you, present everywhere, heard her where she was and had mercy on me where I was, so that I recovered the health of my body, though still sick in my sacrilegious heart. For in that great danger I did not long for your baptism. I was better as a boy, when I begged for it from my mother's devotion, as I have already recalled and confessed. But I had grown up to my own disgrace, and like a madman I laughed at the counsels of your

14 An allusion to Genesis 3:16, the pain of childbirth laid on Eve.
15 1 Corinthians 15:22. The Manichees held that Christ's body, and so his death, was only apparent.

medicine—you who did not let me die twice in such a state. Had my mother's heart been struck by that wound, it would never have healed. For I cannot say enough what feeling she had for me, and with how much greater anxiety she was in labor with me in the spirit than when she gave birth to me in the flesh.

5.9.17 So I do not see how she could have been healed, if such a death of mine had pierced the depths of her love. And where would all those prayers have gone, so many and so frequent, without ceasing? Nowhere but to you. Or would you, God of mercies, despise "the contrite and humbled heart" of a chaste and sober widow, generous in giving alms, attentive to your saints and serving them, letting no day pass without an offering at your altar, coming to your church twice a day, morning and evening, without fail—not for idle tales and old women's gossip, but so that she might hear you in your sermons and you might hear her in her prayers? Would you despise her tears, with which she asked you not for gold or silver, nor for any unstable or fleeting good, but for the salvation of her son's soul—you, by whose gift she was what she was? Would you turn them away from your help? Never, Lord.[16] No—you were there, you were listening, and you were acting in the order in which you had predestined it should be done. Far be it from you to have deceived her in those visions and answers of yours—those I have already mentioned and those I have not—which she held in her faithful heart and, always praying, pressed upon you like bonds signed in your own hand. For you deign, since "your mercy endures forever," to become by your promises a debtor to those whose debts you forgive entirely.[17]

5.10.18 So you restored me from that sickness and made the son of your servant well—in body, for the time being—so that there would be someone to whom you could give a better and surer health. Even then, at Rome, I associated with those false and deceiving "saints": not only with their hearers, among whom was the man in whose house I had fallen ill and recovered, but

16 Psalm 51:17.
17 Psalm 118:1.

also with those they call the elect. For it still seemed to me that it is not we who sin, but some other nature in us that sins. It pleased my pride to be beyond blame, and, when I had done something wrong, not to confess that I had done it so that you might heal my soul, since it had sinned against you. Instead I loved to excuse myself and accuse some other thing that was with me and yet was not I. But in truth it was all I, and my impiety had divided me against myself. That sin was all the more incurable because I did not think I was a sinner; and it was a detestable wickedness that I preferred you, almighty God—you! —to be defeated in me to my destruction, rather than myself to be defeated by you to my salvation. You had not yet "set a guard on my mouth and a door of self-control around my lips," so that my heart would not "turn aside to evil words, to make excuses for sins with those who work iniquity." And so I still kept company with their elect; yet I already despaired of making progress in that false teaching, and even the beliefs with which I had decided to be content if I found nothing better, I now held more loosely and carelessly.[18]

DRAWN TO THE ACADEMICS

Augustine is drawn to the Academic skeptics' doubt while still mixing with Manichees in Rome.

5.10.19 For the thought had also arisen in me that the philosophers they call the Academics had been wiser than the rest, because they held that everything should be doubted and had concluded that no truth can be grasped by a human being. That, too, is what they seemed to me clearly to have thought, as they are commonly taken to have done; I did not yet understand what they really meant. Nor did I hold back from restraining that same host of mine from the excessive confidence I saw he had in the fabulous stories that fill the Manichees' books. Yet I was on friendlier terms with them than with other people who had not

18 Psalm 141:3–4.

belonged to that heresy.[19] I no longer defended it with my former passion; but my close ties with them—Rome hides a great many of them—made me slower to look for anything else. This was all the more so because I despaired of finding the truth in your Church, Lord of heaven and earth, Creator of all things visible and invisible, from which they had turned me away. It seemed to me very shameful to believe that you had the shape of human flesh and were bounded by the bodily outlines of our limbs. And since, when I wanted to think about my God, I did not know how to think of anything but bodily masses—for nothing seemed to me to exist that was not of that kind—this was the greatest and almost the only cause of my inescapable error.

5.10.20 From this came my belief that evil too was some such substance, with its own mass, foul and misshapen and dense—which they called earth—or else thin and fine, like the body of air, which they imagine as a malignant mind creeping through that earth. And because such piety as I had compelled me to believe that a good God had created no evil nature, I set up two masses opposed to each other, both infinite, but the evil one narrower and the good one larger; and from this pestilential beginning the rest of my sacrileges followed. For whenever my mind tried to run back to the Catholic faith, I was thrown back, because the Catholic faith was not what I thought it was. I thought myself more devout if I believed that you, my God—to whom your mercies make confession through me—were infinite at least on the other sides, even though on one side, where the mass of evil was set against you, I was forced to admit you were finite, than if I supposed you were bounded on all sides by the form of a human body. And it seemed better to me to believe that you had created no evil—which, in my ignorance, seemed to me not only some kind of substance but a bodily one, since I did not know how to think even of mind except as a fine body, though one spread through the spaces of place—than to believe that the nature of evil, as I conceived it, came from you. Even

19 The Academics: skeptics of Plato's later Academy, such as Arcesilaus and Carneades, whom Augustine knew chiefly through Cicero.

our Savior himself, your only-begotten, I thought of as if he had been stretched out for our salvation from the mass of your most shining bulk, so that I believed nothing of him except what I could imagine in my vanity. So I thought such a nature as his could not be born of the Virgin Mary unless it were mingled with flesh. And I could not see how it could be mingled without being defiled, picturing it as I did. So I was afraid to believe he was born in the flesh, lest I be forced to believe he was defiled by the flesh. Now your spiritual ones will laugh at me gently and lovingly, if they read these confusions of mine; but that is what I was.

5.11.21 Next, I did not think the things they had criticized in your Scriptures could be defended; yet at times I did want to discuss each point with someone deeply learned in those books and find out what he thought. For already at Carthage the talks of a certain Elpidius, who spoke and argued in person against these same Manichees, had begun to move me, since he brought forward things from the Scriptures that could not easily be resisted. Their reply seemed weak to me—a reply they did not readily bring out in public, but only to us in private: that the Scriptures of the New Testament had been falsified by somebody or other who wanted to graft the law of the Jews onto the Christian faith; yet they themselves produced no uncorrupted copies. But what most held me captive, and in a way stifled me, as I thought in bodily terms, were those masses; weighed down under them, gasping, I could not breathe the pure and simple air of your truth.[20]

5.12.22 So I began diligently to do what I had come for, to teach the art of rhetoric at Rome, and first to gather at my house some people to whom, and through whom, I had begun to be known. And look—I discovered that at Rome things happen that I had not had to put up with in Africa. It was indeed made plain to me that those wreckings by dissolute young men did not happen there. "But suddenly," people said, "to avoid paying their teacher

20 Elpidius: a Catholic otherwise unknown, who debated the Manichees publicly at Carthage.

his fee, a crowd of young men conspire together and transfer to another—breakers of faith, for whom justice is cheap compared with love of money." My heart hated these too, though not "with a perfect hatred." For perhaps I hated more what I was going to suffer from them than the fact that they were doing wrong to anyone at all.[21] Such people are certainly base. They are unfaithful to you, loving the flighty mockeries of time and filthy gain, which soils the hand that grasps it; they embrace a fleeting world and despise you, who remain, and call back, and forgive the human soul that returns to you from its unfaithfulness. And now I hate such crooked and twisted people, though I love them as people to be set right—so that they may prefer the learning they acquire to money, and to learning prefer you, God, the truth and abundance of sure good and most chaste peace. But then I was more unwilling to suffer them as bad people for my own sake than I wanted them to become good for yours.

AMBROSE

Appointed to teach rhetoric in Milan, Augustine hears Ambrose preach and begins to reconsider the Catholic faith.

5.13.23 So when a request came from Milan to the prefect of the city of Rome to provide that city with a teacher of rhetoric, with travel at public expense granted as well, I myself canvassed for it through those very people drunk with Manichaean vanities—I was going in order to be rid of them, though neither they nor I knew it—so that Symmachus, then prefect, might test me with a set speech and send me. And I came to Milan, to Ambrose the bishop, known throughout the world as among the best, your devout worshiper, whose eloquence in those days vigorously dispensed to your people the richness of your wheat, the gladness of oil, and the sober intoxication of wine. I was led to him by you without knowing it, so that through him I might be led to you knowing it. That man of God received me like a father and welcomed my coming from abroad as a bishop should. And I

21 Psalm 139:22.

began to love him—at first not as a teacher of truth, which I utterly despaired of finding in your Church, but as a man who was kind to me.[22] I listened eagerly to him preaching to the people—not with the intention I should have had, but as if testing his eloquence, to see whether it lived up to its reputation or flowed more or less fully than was said. I hung intently on his words, but stood by uninterested in their content and scornful of it. I was delighted by the sweetness of his speech, which was more learned than Faustus's, though, as far as manner of delivery goes, less lively and less soothing. As for the substance, there was no comparison: the one was wandering astray among Manichaean deceptions, while the other was teaching salvation in the most saving way. But "salvation is far from sinners," such as I then was, standing there; and yet I was drawing nearer, gradually and without knowing it.[23]

5.14.24 For though I did not take pains to learn what he said, but only to hear how he said it—that empty concern was all I had left, since I despaired that any way lay open for a human being to you—the things I neglected came into my mind together with the words I loved; for I could not separate them. And while I opened my heart to take in how eloquently he spoke, there entered with it how truly he spoke—though only step by step. First it began to seem to me that these things too could be defended, and that the Catholic faith, for which I had thought nothing could be said against the Manichees' attacks, could be maintained without shame. This was especially so after I had heard one riddle from the Old Testament solved, then another, and then many more—passages that killed me when I took them literally.[24] So when many passages in those books had been explained spiritually, I now began to blame my despair—at least the despair in which I had believed that those who hated and mocked the Law and the Prophets could not be resisted at all.

22 Symmachus, pagan senator and celebrated orator, prefect of Rome in AD 384. Ambrose (about AD 340–397), bishop of Milan from 374.
23 Psalm 119:155.
24 An echo of 2 Corinthians 3:6, "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."

Yet I did not therefore feel that I should hold to the Catholic way, since it too could have its learned defenders, who refuted objections fully and not absurdly; nor did I therefore think that what I held should now be condemned, since the two sides were equally matched in their defense. For the Catholic faith did not seem to me defeated, yet it did not yet appear victorious either.

5.14.25 Then indeed I strained my mind hard, to see whether I could somehow convict the Manichees of falsehood by some sure proofs. If I had been able to conceive of a spiritual substance, all those contrivances of theirs would at once have been undone and thrown out of my mind; but I could not. Still, as I considered and compared more and more, I judged that most of the philosophers had held far more probable views about the body of this world and all of nature that the bodily senses reach. And so, in the manner of the Academics as they are commonly understood, doubting everything and wavering among all things, I decided that the Manichees at least must be abandoned; I did not think that in the very time of my doubt I should remain in a sect to which I already preferred some philosophers. Yet to those philosophers, because they were without the saving name of Christ, I utterly refused to entrust the cure of my soul's sickness. So I resolved to be a catechumen in the Catholic Church, which my parents had commended to me, until some certainty should shine out by which I could steer my course.

Book VI

Milan: Monica, Alypius, and worldly ambitions
In Milan Augustine wavers among ambition, marriage plans and friends while seeking truth.

MONICA IN MILAN

Monica joins Augustine in Milan, obeys Ambrose over African customs, and hopes for his conversion.

6.1.1 My hope from my youth, where were you all this while, and where had you withdrawn to? Had you not made me, and set me apart from the four-footed beasts, and made me wiser than the birds of the air? Yet I walked through darkness and on slippery ground, and I sought you outside myself, and I did not find the God of my heart. I had come into the depths of the sea; I had lost confidence and despaired of finding the truth. My mother had already come to me, strong in her devotion, following me over land and sea, and secure in you through every danger. In the perils of the sea she even comforted the sailors themselves—who usually comfort inexperienced travelers on the deep when they are frightened—promising them they would arrive safely, because you had promised her this in a vision. She found me in grave danger through despair of discovering the truth. But when I told her that I was no longer a Manichee, though not a Catholic Christian either, she did not leap for joy as if she had heard something unexpected. She was already reassured about that part of my misery, for which she wept for me before you as for someone dead but to be raised again. She was offering me on the bier of her thoughts, so that you would say to the widow's son, "Young man, I say to you, arise," and he would come back to life

and begin to speak, and you would give him back to his mother. So her heart was not shaken by any turbulent exultation when she heard that so great a part of what she lamented before you every day, praying that it might happen, had already happened: I had not yet gained the truth, but I had already been rescued from falsehood.[1] No: because she was sure that you would also grant what remained, since you had promised the whole, she answered me very calmly and with a heart full of confidence that she believed in Christ that before she departed this life she would see me a faithful Catholic. That much she said to me. But to you, fountain of mercies, she poured out more frequent prayers and tears, that you would hasten your help and light up my darkness; and she ran more eagerly to church and hung on Ambrose's lips, as on "a fountain of water springing up to eternal life." She loved that man like an angel of God, because she had learned that it was through him that I had been brought, for the moment, to that wavering state of uncertainty. She took it for certain that through it I would pass from sickness to health, with a sharper danger coming in between, like the attack that doctors call the "crisis."[2]

6.2.2 So when she had brought porridge and bread and wine to the shrines of the saints, as was her custom in Africa, and was stopped by the doorkeeper, as soon as she learned that the bishop had forbidden it, she accepted this so devoutly and obediently that I myself marveled at how readily she became an accuser of her own custom rather than a critic of his prohibition.[3] For no fondness for wine laid siege to her spirit, nor did love of wine goad her into hatred of the truth, as it does many men and women who, soaked in drink, are as sickened by a hymn to sobriety as by a watered-down drink. Rather, when she had brought her basket of customary food, to be tasted and then shared out, she would set out no more than one small cup,

1 Luke 7:14–15.
2 John 4:14.
3 In North Africa it was customary to bring food and drink to martyrs' tombs and share it there.

mixed to suit her very sober palate, from which to take a sip as a mark of respect. And if there were many shrines of the dead that seemed to deserve honor in this way, she carried around the same single cup to set down at each; and she shared it with those present in tiny sips, by then not only very watery but quite lukewarm, because she was seeking devotion there, not pleasure. So when she learned that the illustrious preacher and master of devotion had ordered that these things not be done even by those who did them soberly, so as not to give drunkards any opportunity to gorge themselves, and because these feasts, like a kind of festival for the dead, closely resembled the superstition of the pagans, she gave them up most willingly. In place of a basket full of the fruits of the earth, she had learned to bring to the shrines of the martyrs a heart full of purer prayers, so that she could give what she could to the needy, and so that the communion of the Lord's body might be celebrated there—in imitation of whose passion the martyrs were sacrificed and crowned. Yet it seems to me, Lord my God—and this is how my heart stands on the matter in your sight—that my mother would perhaps not easily have given up this custom if it had been forbidden by someone else whom she did not love as she loved Ambrose.[4] She loved him above all for the sake of my salvation, and he in turn loved her for her deeply devout way of life: fervent in spirit and busy with good works, she was constantly at church. So whenever he saw me he would often burst out in her praise, congratulating me on having such a mother—not knowing what kind of son she had in me, who doubted all these things and scarcely thought that the way of life could be found.

AMBROSE READING

Augustine watches Ambrose read silently and learns from his sermons to read Scripture spiritually.

6.3.3 I no longer groaned in prayer for you to come to my help; my mind was intent on searching and restless for argument.

Ambrose himself I considered a fortunate man by the world's standards, honored as he was by such great powers; only his celibacy seemed to me a heavy burden. But what hope he carried within him, what struggle he had against the temptations of his own eminence, what comfort he found in adversity, and what savory joys the hidden mouth of his heart tasted as it chewed on your bread—these things I could not guess, and had never experienced. Nor did he know my turmoil or the pit of danger I was in. For I could not ask him what I wanted, in the way I wanted, since crowds of busy people, whose weaknesses he served, shut me off from his ear and his mouth. And when he was not with them, which was only a very little time, he was refreshing either his body with the food it needed or his mind with reading. When he read, his eyes ran over the pages and his heart searched out the meaning, but his voice and tongue were still. Often when we were there—for no one was forbidden to come in, and it was not the custom for visitors to be announced—we saw him reading like this, silently, and never any other way. We would sit a long while in silence (for who would dare to burden a man so absorbed?) and then go away. We guessed that in the little time he managed to find for restoring his mind, free from the din of other people's affairs, he did not want to be called away to anything else. Perhaps he was also wary that if a listener were hanging on his words, and the author he was reading had put something obscurely, he would have to explain it, or argue over some of the harder questions; and that, with his time spent on such work, he would get through fewer volumes than he wished. Though the need to save his voice, which very easily grew hoarse, may have been a sounder reason for reading silently. Whatever his intention in doing it, a man like that certainly did it with a good one.

6.3.4 But certainly I was given no chance to ask what I longed to ask of that holy oracle of yours, his heart, except when something could be heard briefly. The surges of my turmoil needed to

4 The Latin compares them to the Parentalia, the Roman festival honoring dead ancestors.

find him completely at leisure, so that they could pour themselves out to him, and they never did. Still, every Lord's day I heard him among the people, "rightly handling the word of truth," and more and more I became convinced that all the knots of cunning slander which those deceivers of ours had tied against the divine books could be untied.[5] And when I also discovered that your spiritual children, whom you have brought to new birth by grace from their Catholic mother, do not understand the words "man made by you in your image" in such a way as to believe and think of you as bounded by the shape of a human body—although I had not even the faintest, most riddling notion of how a spiritual substance could exist—I blushed, and yet rejoiced, that for so many years I had been barking not against the Catholic faith but against figments of carnal imagination. I had been rash and impious in this: what I ought to have learned by inquiring, I had asserted by accusing. For you, most high and most near, most hidden and most present, who have no limbs, some larger and some smaller, but are everywhere whole and nowhere in space—you are certainly not this bodily form; and yet you made man in your image, and look: from head to foot he is in space.

6.4.5 So, since I did not know how this image of yours could exist, I ought to have knocked and asked how it was to be believed, not mockingly attacked it as if it were believed in the way I imagined. The anxiety about what I could hold on to as certain gnawed at my insides all the more sharply, the more ashamed I was that, deluded and deceived for so long by the promise of certainties, I had chattered with childish error and heat about so many uncertain things as if they were certain. That they were false became clear to me only later. But it was certain even then that they were uncertain, and that I had once taken them as certain when I attacked your Catholic Church with blind contentiousness—a Church I had not yet found to teach the truth, but which did not teach what I so fiercely accused it of. So I was put to shame and turned around, and I

5 2 Timothy 2:15. "Those deceivers" are the Manichees.

rejoiced, my God, that the one Church, the body of your one and only Son, in which the name of Christ had been put upon me as an infant, had no taste for infantile nonsense, and did not hold in its sound teaching that you, the creator of all things, were crammed into a space—however lofty and vast, still bounded on every side—in the shape of human limbs.

6.4.6 I rejoiced too that the old writings of the Law and the Prophets were no longer set before me to be read with that eye to which they had once seemed absurd, when I criticized your saints for thinking things which in truth they did not think. And I was glad to hear Ambrose often saying in his sermons to the people, as though he were carefully commending it as a rule: "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." For he would draw aside the mystical veil and open up in a spiritual sense passages which, taken literally, seemed to teach something perverse. He said nothing that offended me, though he said things I did not yet know to be true or false. For I kept my heart from assenting to anything, afraid of falling headlong; and by that hanging in suspense I was all the more being strangled. I wanted to be as certain of the things I could not see as I was that seven and three make ten. I was not so mad as to think that even this could not be known; but I wanted everything else to be known in the same way—whether bodily things not present to my senses, or spiritual things, which I did not know how to think of except in bodily terms. And I could have been healed by believing, so that the sight of my mind, made purer, might somehow be directed toward your truth, which always abides and never falls short in anything. But just as it often happens that someone who has had a bad doctor is afraid to trust himself even to a good one, so it was with the health of my soul. It certainly could not be healed except by believing, and yet, for fear of believing what was false, it refused to be cured, resisting your hands—you who prepared the medicines of faith, sprinkled them over the diseases of the whole world, and gave them such great authority.

6.5.7 From this point on, however, I began to prefer Catholic teaching. I felt that it acted more modestly, and with no deceit at

all, in bidding us believe what was not demonstrated (whether because it could be demonstrated, though perhaps not to everyone, or because it could not be demonstrated at all), than the other side did, where credulity was mocked with a rash promise of knowledge, and then so many utterly fabulous and absurd things were commanded to be believed because they could not be demonstrated. Then little by little, Lord, with a most gentle and merciful hand you touched and set in order my heart. I considered how countless were the things I believed without seeing them, or without being present when they happened: so much in the history of nations, so much about places and cities I had never seen, so much on the word of friends, so much on the word of doctors, so much on the word of one person or another—things which, unless they were believed, we could do nothing at all in this life. Finally I considered how unshakably and firmly I held by faith who my parents were, which I could not know unless I had believed what I heard. And so you persuaded me that it was not those who believed your books—which you have established with such great authority among almost all nations—but those who did not believe them who were to be blamed; and that I should not listen to anyone who might say to me, "How do you know that those books were given to the human race by the Spirit of the one true and supremely truthful God?" For this was the very thing most to be believed. In all the many works I had read of philosophers contradicting one another, no combative, slanderous questioning had ever been able to wring from me a moment when I did not believe that you exist—whatever you are, which I did not know—or that the government of human affairs belongs to you.

6.5.8 But I believed this sometimes more robustly, sometimes more feebly. Still, I always believed both that you exist and that you care for us, even though I did not know what to think about your substance, or what way led to you, or led back to you. And so, since we were too weak to find the truth by clear reason, and for that reason needed the authority of the holy Scriptures, I had now begun to believe that you would never have given that

Scripture such surpassing authority throughout all lands unless you had willed that through it you should be believed in, and through it sought. For the absurdity that used to offend me in those writings, now that I had heard many passages plausibly explained, I attributed to the depth of their mysteries. And that authority seemed to me all the more worthy of reverence and of holy faith because it lay open for everyone to read, and yet kept the dignity of its secret for a deeper understanding. It offers itself to all in the plainest words and the humblest style of speech, and yet exercises the attention of those who are not light of heart. So it welcomes everyone into its broad embrace, and through narrow openings brings a few across to you—yet many more than if it did not stand out on so lofty a peak of authority, or did not draw the crowds into the lap of its holy humility. I was thinking these things, and you were with me; I sighed, and you heard me; I was tossed about, and you steered me; I walked the broad way of the world, and you did not abandon me.

6.6.9 I gaped after honors, money, marriage, and you laughed at me. In these cravings I suffered the bitterest hardships—and you were the more gracious to me, the less you let anything that was not you grow sweet to me. Look at my heart, Lord, you who willed that I should remember this and confess it to you. Now let my soul cling to you, the soul you have freed from such sticky birdlime of death. How wretched it was! And you pricked the sore of its wound, so that it might leave everything and turn to you, who are above all things, and without whom all things would be nothing—turn, and be healed.

THE DRUNKEN BEGGAR

Before a speech praising the emperor, Augustine envies a cheerful drunken beggar and questions his ambitions.

How wretched I was, then, and how you acted to make me feel my wretchedness on the day when I was preparing to deliver a speech in praise of the emperor! In it I was going to tell a good many lies, and be applauded for lying by people who knew it.

My heart was panting over these worries and burning with the fever of consuming thoughts. Passing through a certain street in Milan, I noticed a poor beggar—already well filled, I suppose—joking and cheerful. I groaned, and spoke with the friends who were with me about the many sorrows our madness brings. For in all such efforts of ours, like the ones I was laboring at then—dragging the load of my unhappiness under the goad of my cravings, and making it heavier by dragging it—we wanted nothing other than to reach a carefree happiness. That beggar had already got there ahead of us, and we perhaps would never arrive. For what he had already obtained with a few begged coins, I was chasing by such wearisome twists and turns: namely, the happiness of a passing well-being.[6] True, he did not have true joy; but I, with those ambitions of mine, was seeking a far falser one. And he, at any rate, was cheerful and I was anxious; he was carefree, I was afraid. If anyone had asked me whether I would rather be merry or fearful, I would have answered, "Merry." But if he had asked again whether I would rather be such a man as he was, or such as I then was, I would have chosen myself, worn out with cares and fears—but out of perversity. Surely not out of truth? For I had no right to prefer myself to him because I was more learned, since I took no joy in that; rather, I used it to seek to please people—not to teach them, but only to please them. That is why you broke my bones with the rod of your discipline.

6.6.10 So away from my soul with those who say to it, "It matters what a person rejoices in. That beggar rejoiced in drunkenness; you in glory." What glory, Lord? A glory that is not in you. For just as his was not true joy, so that was not true glory either, and it overturned my mind all the more. And he would sleep off his drunkenness that very night; I had gone to sleep with mine and got up with it, and would go to sleep and get up with it again—look, how many days! It does matter what a person rejoices in, I know, and the joy of a faithful hope is incomparably distant

6 As official teacher of rhetoric at Milan, Augustine delivered panegyrics on the young emperor Valentinian II (AD 385).

from that emptiness. But even then there was a distance between him and me. He was certainly the happier: not only because he was drenched in cheerfulness while I was gutted by cares, but also because he had got his wine by wishing people well, while I was chasing puffed-up vanity by telling lies. I said many things along these lines to my dear friends at that time, and often in these reflections I noticed how things stood with me. I found that it went badly with me, and I grieved, and so doubled that very badness. And if any good fortune smiled on me, I could not be bothered to seize it, because it flew away almost before it could be held.

ALYPIUS AND THE GAMES

Augustine tells how his friend Alypius was cured of, then relapsed into, a passion for gladiatorial games.

6.7.11 Those of us who lived together as friends groaned together over these things, and I talked of them most of all with Alypius and Nebridius. Alypius was born in the same town as I was, to parents of one of its leading families, and was younger than I. He had studied with me when I first began to teach in our town, and afterward at Carthage. He loved me greatly, because I seemed to him good and learned; and I loved him for his great natural bent toward virtue, which stood out plainly in one so young. But the whirlpool of Carthaginian morals, where frivolous shows are all the rage, had sucked him into a mania for the circus. While he was being wretchedly whirled around in it, and I was teaching rhetoric there in a public school, he did not yet attend my classes as his teacher, because of a quarrel that had arisen between his father and me.[7] I had learned that he had a ruinous passion for the circus, and I was deeply distressed, because he seemed to me about to throw away such great promise, or to have thrown it away already. But I had no means of warning him and calling him back by some restraint, either through the goodwill of friendship or by a teacher's authority.

7 Alypius, later bishop of their hometown, Thagaste. The circus: chariot racing.

For I thought he felt about me as his father did; but that was not so. So, setting aside his father's wishes in this matter, he had begun to greet me, coming into my lecture room, listening for a while, and then leaving.

6.7.12 But it had slipped my mind to take the matter up with him, so that he would not ruin so fine a talent through a blind and headlong enthusiasm for empty games. But you, Lord, who hold the helm of everything you have created, had not forgotten that he was to be, among your sons, a bishop presiding over your sacrament. And so that his correction might be plainly credited to you, you brought it about through me—but without my knowing. For one day, as I sat in my usual place with my students before me, he came in, greeted me, sat down, and turned his attention to what was going on. As it happened, I had a text in hand, and as I was explaining it a comparison with the circus games seemed apt, to make my point more enjoyable and clearer, with biting mockery of those whom that madness had taken captive. You know, our God, that I was not thinking at the time of curing Alypius of that plague. But he took it to himself, and believed I had said it only because of him. What someone else would have taken as a reason to be angry with me, this honest young man took as a reason to be angry with himself, and to love me more ardently. For you had said long ago, and woven into your Scriptures, "Rebuke a wise man, and he will love you." But I had not rebuked him. Rather you, who make use of everyone, knowing or unknowing, in the order you know—and that order is just—made burning coals of my heart and tongue, with which to cauterize and heal a mind of good promise that was wasting away. Let him be silent in your praise who does not consider your mercies, which confess to you from my very marrow.[8] And indeed, after those words he pulled himself out of that deep pit, where he had been willingly plunging and blinding himself with astonishing pleasure. He shook his mind free with strong restraint; all the filth of the circus sprang off him, and he never went there again. Then he overcame his father's reluct-

8 Proverbs 9:8.

ance so that he could have me as his teacher; his father gave way and allowed it. And when he began to attend my lectures again, he became entangled along with me in that superstition, loving the Manichees' display of self-control, which he thought was true and genuine. But it was senseless and seductive, capturing precious souls not yet able to reach the heights of virtue and easily taken in by the surface—though it was only the surface of a virtue shadowed and counterfeit.

6.8.13 He had certainly not abandoned the worldly path that his parents had chanted over him like a spell, and he had gone ahead of me to Rome to study law. There, incredibly, he was carried away by an incredible craving for gladiatorial shows. He loathed and detested such things. But one day some of his friends and fellow students, coming back from lunch, happened to meet him on the way, and though he vehemently refused and resisted, they dragged him with a friendly violence into the amphitheater during the days of the cruel and deadly games. He said: "If you drag my body to that place, can you really fix my mind and my eyes on those shows? I will be there and yet absent, and so I will get the better of both you and them." When they heard this they brought him along with them all the same, perhaps wanting to find out whether he could do what he said. When they arrived and had found what seats they could, the whole place was seething with the most savage pleasures. He shut the doors of his eyes and forbade his mind to go out to such evils. If only he had stopped up his ears too! For at a certain turn in the fight, when a huge roar from the whole crowd struck him hard, he was overcome by curiosity; and supposing himself ready to despise and overcome whatever it was, even once seen, he opened his eyes. And he was struck with a deeper wound in his soul than the man he wanted to see had received in his body, and he fell more wretchedly than the man whose fall had raised the roar. That roar entered through his ears and unlocked his eyes, opening a way to strike and throw down a mind that was still more reckless than strong—and all the weaker for having relied on itself, when it ought to have relied on you. For as soon

as he saw that blood, he drank in savagery along with it. He did not turn away, but fixed his gaze; he was gulping down frenzy without knowing it, delighting in the wickedness of the contest and getting drunk on bloody pleasure. He was no longer the man who had come, but one of the crowd he had come into, and a true companion of those who had brought him. What more is there to say? He watched, he shouted, he burned, and he carried away with him a madness that would goad him to come back—not only with those who had first dragged him there, but ahead of them, and dragging others along. And yet from all this you rescued him, with your most strong and merciful hand, and taught him to put his trust not in himself but in you—but that was much later.

ALYPIUS ARRESTED AS A THIEF

As a student, Alypius is wrongly arrested as a thief, and later resists bribery as a legal assessor.

6.9.14 Still, this was already being stored up in his memory as a medicine for the future. There was another incident too. While he was still a student, already attending my lectures at Carthage, he was in the forum at midday thinking over a speech he was to recite, as students usually practice. You let him be seized as a thief by the custodians of the forum. I think you allowed this, our God, for no other reason than that this man, who was to be so great, might already begin to learn that in hearing cases one person should not readily condemn another through rash credulity. He was walking alone in front of the tribunal with his writing tablets and stylus, when suddenly a young man, one of the students—the real thief—secretly brought an axe and, without Alypius noticing, got in to the lead railings that overlook the silversmiths' street from above, and began to cut away the lead. When they heard the sound of the axe, the silversmiths below began to murmur, and they sent men to seize whomever they might find. Hearing their voices, the thief left his tool behind and made off, afraid of being caught with it. Alypius, who had

not seen him go in, noticed him coming out and saw him hurrying away. Wanting to know why, he went into the place, found the axe, and was standing there looking at it in puzzlement—when suddenly the men who had been sent find him alone, holding the iron whose sound had roused them. They seize him, drag him off, gather the people who lived around the forum, and boast that they have caught a thief red-handed; and from there he was being led away to be handed over to the courts.

6.9.15 But this was as far as his lesson was to go. For at once, Lord, you came to the aid of his innocence, of which you alone were the witness. As he was being led off either to prison or to punishment, they were met by an architect who had chief responsibility for the public buildings. They were delighted to have run into him of all people, since he used to suspect them when things went missing from the forum—so now at last, they thought, he would know who was doing it. But the man had often seen Alypius at the house of a certain senator whom he regularly went to pay his respects to. He recognized him at once, took him by the hand, led him away from the crowd, and asked the reason for such serious trouble. He heard what had happened, and ordered the whole noisy crowd, grumbling and threatening, to come with him. And they came to the house of the young man who had committed the crime. Now there was a slave boy in front of the door, so young that he could easily tell the whole story without fearing any consequences for his master; for he had been with him in the forum as his attendant. As soon as Alypius recalled him, he told the architect. The architect showed the axe to the boy and asked him whose it was. "Ours," he said at once; and then, when questioned, he disclosed the rest. So the case was transferred to that house, the crowd that had already begun to triumph over Alypius was put to shame, and the future dispenser of your word and judge of many cases in your Church went away more experienced and better instructed.

6.10.16 It was this Alypius, then, whom I had found at Rome. He clung to me with the strongest bond and set out with me for

Milan, both so as not to leave me and to make some use of the law he had learned—more to fulfill his parents' wishes than his own. He had already sat three times as an assessor, with a self-control that amazed others, while he was the more amazed at those who put gold above integrity. His character was tested not only by the lure of greed but also by the goad of fear. At Rome he was assessor to the Count of the Italian Treasury. At that time there was a very powerful senator to whom many were bound by his favors and many subjected by terror. He wanted to be allowed something or other, as men of his power were used to, that the laws forbade. Alypius resisted. A bribe was promised; in his heart he laughed at it.[9] Threats were made; he trampled on them. Everyone marveled at so unusual a spirit, which neither wished to have as a friend, nor feared as an enemy, a man so great and so famous for his countless ways of helping and harming. The judge himself, whose adviser Alypius was, did not want it done either, yet would not openly refuse; he shifted the matter onto Alypius, claiming that Alypius would not let him—and in fact, if he had done it, Alypius would have walked out. Only in one thing was he almost led astray, by his love of learning: he considered having books copied for himself at the special rates available to the praetorian court. But he consulted justice and changed his mind for the better, judging that fairness, which forbade it, was more valuable than power, which allowed it. This is a small thing. But "whoever is faithful in little is faithful also in much," and nothing will ever be empty that came from the mouth of your Truth: "If you have not been faithful with unrighteous wealth, who will entrust you with what is true? And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own?" Such was the man who was clinging to me then, and who wavered with me in deciding what way of life we should hold to.[10]

6.10.17 Nebridius too had left his home country near Carthage, and Carthage itself, where he spent most of his time; he had left

9 An assessor was a legal adviser to a magistrate; the Count of the Italian Treasury was the imperial finance official for Italy.

his father's excellent estate, left his house, and left his mother, who was not going to follow him. He had come to Milan for no other reason than to live with me in a most ardent pursuit of truth and wisdom. Like me he sighed, like me he wavered: a burning seeker of the happy life and a most penetrating examiner of the hardest questions. So there were the mouths of three needy people, gasping out their want to one another and waiting on you, that you might give them their food in due season. And in all the bitterness which, by your mercy, followed our worldly doings, when we looked for the purpose of our suffering, darkness met us. We turned away groaning and said, "How long is this to go on?" We said this often, and while saying it we did not give those things up, because nothing certain shone out that we could grasp once we had given them up.

THIRTY AND STILL SEARCHING

Nearly thirty, Augustine despairs over his unfinished search for wisdom and the pull of career and marriage.

6.11.18 And I most of all was amazed, as I anxiously went back over how long a time it had been since my nineteenth year, when I first began to burn with zeal for wisdom, resolving that once I found it I would leave behind all the empty hopes and lying follies of vain cravings. And here I was, already turning thirty, stuck in the same mud, greedy to enjoy present things that were fleeing from me and scattering me, while I kept saying: Tomorrow I will find it. Look, it will appear plainly, and I will hold on to it. Look, Faustus will come and explain everything. O you great men, the Academics! Nothing certain for the conduct of life can be grasped. No—let us search more carefully and not despair. Look, the things in the Church's books that used to seem absurd are no longer absurd; they can be understood differently, and in a proper sense. I will plant my feet on the step where my parents set me as a boy, until the clear truth is found. But where is it to be sought? When is it to be sought? Ambrose has no time;

10 Luke 16:10–12. "Your Truth" is Christ.

there is no time to read. Where do we even look for the books? Where, or when, can we buy them? From whom can we borrow them? Let times be set aside, let hours be allotted for the health of the soul. A great hope has dawned: the Catholic faith does not teach what we thought, and what in our emptiness we accused it of. Its learned men hold it sacrilege to believe that God is bounded by the shape of a human body. And do we hesitate to knock, so that the rest may be opened to us? My students take up the morning hours; what do we do with the rest? Why don't we do this? But then when do we pay our respects to influential friends, whose support we need? When do we prepare what students will pay for? When do we restore ourselves, relaxing our minds from the strain of our cares? Away with it all!

6.11.19 Let us dismiss all these empty, pointless things and devote ourselves solely to the search for truth. Life is miserable, death uncertain. Suppose it creeps up on us suddenly: in what state will we leave this world? And where are we to learn what we neglected here? Will we not rather have to pay the penalty for this neglect? Or what if death itself cuts off and ends all care along with all sensation? Then this too must be looked into. But God forbid that it should be so. It is not for nothing, it is not empty, that the towering summit of the Christian faith's authority is spread across the whole world. Such great things, and such things, would never be done for us by God if the life of the soul were also used up by the death of the body. Why, then, do we hesitate to give up worldly hope and devote ourselves wholly to seeking God and the happy life? But wait: these things are pleasant too; they have no little sweetness of their own. We should not lightly cut off our pursuit of them, since it would be shameful to go back to them again. Just think what an achievement it would be to obtain some official post now. And what more should we wish for in this life? We have plenty of influential friends: if nothing else, and if we press hard, even a provincial governorship could be granted. And we should marry a wife with some money, so that she does not add to our expenses; and that will be the limit of our craving. Many great men, most

worthy of imitation, have devoted themselves to the study of wisdom while married.

6.11.20 While I was saying these things, and these winds shifted back and forth and drove my heart this way and that, time was passing, and I was slow to turn to the Lord. From day to day I put off living in you, and did not put off dying daily in myself. Loving the happy life, I feared it in its own dwelling-place, and while fleeing from it I sought it. For I thought I would be too miserable if I were deprived of a woman's embraces. I gave no thought to the medicine of your mercy for healing that weakness, because I had not tried it; and I believed that self-control came from one's own strength, a strength I was not aware of having. I was so foolish that I did not know that, as it is written, no one can have self-control unless you grant it. And you would surely have granted it, if I had knocked at your ears with inward groaning and with firm faith had cast my care on you.[11]

6.12.21 Alypius, it is true, kept me from taking a wife, harping on the point that if I did, we could not possibly live together in carefree leisure for the love of wisdom, as we had long desired. For he himself was even then extremely chaste in this respect—remarkably so, since he had had some experience of sexual intercourse at the start of his adolescence. But he had not become attached to it; rather he had regretted and despised it, and from then on lived with complete self-control. I, on the other hand, countered him with the examples of men who had been married and yet had cultivated wisdom, found favor with God, and been faithful and loving to their friends. I was far from their greatness of spirit. Bound by the disease of the flesh and its deadly sweetness, I dragged my chain along, afraid to be released; and as if my wound had been jarred, I pushed away the words of good advice as though they were a hand untying me. Moreover, through me the serpent was speaking to Alypius himself, weaving and scattering sweet snares in his path through my tongue, to entangle his honorable and unencumbered feet.

6.12.22 For he was amazed that I, whom he thought highly of, was so stuck in the birdlime of that pleasure that I would insist, whenever we discussed it between us, that I could never lead a celibate life. And when I saw his amazement, I defended myself by saying that there was a great difference between what he had experienced hurriedly and furtively—which he could hardly even remember now, and so could easily despise without any distress—and the delights of my own habit; and if the honorable name of marriage were added to these, he should not wonder why I could not despise that life. So he too began to desire marriage—not at all overcome by lust for that pleasure, but by curiosity. For he said he wanted to know what this thing was, without which my life, which he liked so much, seemed to me not a life but a punishment. For his mind, free of that chain, was astonished at my slavery, and through astonishment was moving toward a desire to try it—on his way to the experience itself, and from there perhaps to fall into the very slavery that astonished him. For he was ready to make a pact with death; and "whoever loves danger will fall into it." Neither of us gave more than slight thought to whatever honor marriage has in the duty of ordering married life and raising children. For the most part it was the habit of sating an insatiable desire that held me captive and tormented me violently, while wonder was drawing him on to be taken captive. So we were, until you, Most High, who do not abandon our clay, took pity on us in our pitiable state and came to our help in wonderful and hidden ways.[12]

PLANS FOR MARRIAGE

Monica arranges a marriage for Augustine, and he agrees to wait two years for the young bride.

6.13.23 Meanwhile I was being pressed, tirelessly, to marry. I was already making my proposal, and a bride was already being promised, largely through my mother's efforts, so that once I

11 Wisdom 8:21.
12 Sirach 3:26 (3:27 in the Latin Bible); the "pact with death" echoes Isaiah 28:15.

was married the saving waters of baptism might wash me. She was glad that I was becoming more fit for it day by day, and saw her prayers and your promises being fulfilled in my faith. At my request, and from her own longing, she begged you every day with a strong cry of the heart to show her something in a vision about my future marriage; but you never would. She did see some empty and fanciful things, produced by the pressure of a human spirit preoccupied with the matter, and she told them to me—not with the confidence she used to have when you showed her something, but dismissing them. For she said that by some kind of taste, which she could not explain in words, she could tell the difference between you revealing something and her own soul dreaming. Still, the pressure went on, and a girl was asked for in marriage who was about two years short of marriageable age; and since she was acceptable, we waited.[13]

A COMMUNITY OF FRIENDS

Augustine and his friends plan a shared life of philosophical leisure, but the plan collapses over wives.

6.14.24 Many of us friends, too, had been turning things over in our minds, talking together and deploring the turbulent troubles of human life, and we had almost resolved to withdraw from the crowds and live in leisure. We had planned that leisure so that whatever each of us could own we would put into a common fund, making one household out of all of them. Through the sincerity of friendship, nothing would be this one's or that one's; instead, one thing would be made out of all, and the whole would belong to each, and everything to everyone. It seemed to us that there could be about ten people in this community, and some of us were very rich—above all Romanianus, from our own town, who had been my close friend from my earliest years, and whom the grave turmoil of his affairs had then drawn to the imperial court. He was the keenest on this plan, and his voice carried great weight in persuading us, because his large fortune

13 Roman law set twelve as the minimum age of marriage for girls.

far exceeded everyone else's.[14] We had agreed that each year two of us, like magistrates, would take care of all necessary business, leaving the rest in peace. But once we began to consider whether our women would allow it—some of us already had wives, and we wanted to have them—the whole plan we had shaped so well fell apart in our hands, broke, and was thrown away. Then back we went to sighs and groans, and our steps turned to follow the broad and well-worn ways of the world; for there were many thoughts in our heart, but your counsel stands forever. Out of that counsel you laughed at our plans and prepared your own for us, intending to give us food in due season, and to open your hand and fill our souls with blessing.

THE PARTING

Augustine's longtime partner is sent back to Africa, and he takes another mistress while awaiting marriage.

6.15.25 Meanwhile my sins were multiplying. The woman I had been used to sleeping with was torn from my side as an obstacle to my marriage, and my heart, which clung to her, was cut and wounded and trailed blood. She had gone back to Africa, vowing to you that she would never know another man, and leaving with me the son I had by her. But I, unhappy man, could not even imitate a woman. Impatient of delay—for I was to receive the girl I was courting only after two years—and because I was no lover of marriage but a slave of lust, I procured another woman, certainly not as a wife. So the disease of my soul would be kept alive, as it were, and carried on, intact or even worse, under the escort of a lasting habit, into the realm of married life. Nor was that wound of mine healed, the one made by cutting away the first woman. After the fever and the sharpest pain it began to fester, and it hurt more coldly, so to speak, but more hopelessly.

6.16.26 Praise to you, glory to you, fountain of mercies! I was growing more wretched, and you were coming nearer. Your

right hand was already there, at any moment about to snatch me out of the mud and wash me clean, and I did not know it. Nothing called me back from a still deeper whirlpool of carnal pleasures except the fear of death and of your judgment to come, which, through all my shifting opinions, never left my heart. And I used to argue with my friends Alypius and Nebridius about the ends of good and evil. Epicurus, I said, would have won the prize in my mind, had I not believed that after death the soul lives on, and so do the consequences of what we have deserved—which Epicurus refused to believe.[15] And I would ask: if we were immortal, and lived in unending bodily pleasure with no fear of losing it, why would we not be happy, or what else would we be looking for? I did not know that this itself was part of my great misery: that, sunk and blind as I was, I could not conceive the light of goodness, and of a beauty to be embraced for its own sake, which the eye of the flesh does not see but which is seen from within. Nor did I consider, wretch that I was, from what spring it flowed that I could talk over even these shameful things with my friends and find it sweet, and that I could not be happy without friends, even by the standard of happiness I held then, however great the abundance of carnal pleasures. These friends I certainly loved for their own sake, and I felt that they in turn loved me for my own sake. O twisting paths! Woe to the reckless soul that hoped, if it withdrew from you, to have something better! Turned and turned again, onto its back, its sides, its belly—everything is hard, and you alone are rest. And look, you are here: you free us from our wretched errors, set us on your way, comfort us, and say, "Run! I will carry you, I will bring you through, and there too I will carry you."

14 Romanianus, a wealthy man of Thagaste who had supported Augustine's education; Augustine later dedicated *Against the Academics* to him.

15 Epicurus (341–270 BC) held pleasure to be the highest good and the soul to die with the body. "The ends of good and evil" echoes the title of Cicero's dialogue on ethics.

Book VII

The Platonist books and the nature of evil
Platonist books help Augustine conceive of God as spirit and of evil as privation.

THINKING OF GOD AS A BODY

Augustine struggles because he can only imagine God as a vast body spread through space.

7.1.1 By now my bad and wicked adolescence was dead, and I was going on into young manhood—the older in years, the more shameful in my emptiness. I could not conceive of any substance except the kind usually seen through these eyes. I did not think of you, God, in the shape of a human body; ever since I had begun to hear something of wisdom, I had always shunned that idea, and I was glad to have found it rejected in the faith of our spiritual mother, your Catholic Church. But what else to think you were did not occur to me. And I, a man—and such a man—was trying to conceive of you, the supreme and only and true God. With all my inmost being I believed you to be incorruptible and inviolable and unchangeable. For, though I did not know where from or how, I saw plainly and was certain that what can be corrupted is worse than what cannot; what cannot be violated I unhesitatingly ranked above what can; and what suffers no change is better than what can change. My heart cried out violently against all my phantoms, and with this one blow I tried to beat away from my mind's eye the swarm of uncleanness flying around it. But scarcely was it driven off when, in the blink of an eye, look, it had massed together again and was back, rushing at my sight and clouding it. So although I did not think

of you in the form of a human body, I was still forced to think of something bodily, extended through space—whether poured into the world or even spread through infinity outside the world. I thought this even of that incorruptible, inviolable, and unchangeable being which I ranked above the corruptible, violable, and changeable. For whatever I stripped of such spaces seemed to me to be nothing—absolutely nothing, not even a void. It was as if a body were taken out of a place, and the place remained emptied of every body, earthy, watery, airy, and heavenly, and yet was still a place, empty, a spacious nothing.

7.1.2 So I, grown dull of heart and not even clear to myself, thought that whatever was not stretched out over some amount of space, or diffused, or massed together, or swelling, or did not contain or could not contain something of that kind, was nothing at all. For my heart moved among images just like the forms my eyes are used to moving among, and I did not see that the very attention by which I formed those images was not anything of that sort—and yet it could not have formed them unless it were something great. So I thought even of you, life of my life, as vast, penetrating the whole mass of the world through infinite spaces on every side, and beyond it in every direction through immensity without end, so that the earth would have you, the sky would have you, all things would have you, and they would be bounded in you, but you nowhere. Just as the body of the air—this air above the earth—does not block the sun's light from passing through it, penetrating it not by bursting or cutting it but by filling it entirely, so I thought that not only the body of the sky, the air, and the sea, but also that of the earth, was open to you, penetrable in all its parts, greatest and least, to receive your presence; and that by a hidden inspiration you governed, within and without, all the things you had created. That was my guess, because I could think of nothing else; but it was false. For in that way a larger part of the earth would hold a larger part of you, and a smaller part a smaller; and all things would be full of you in such a way that an elephant's body would hold more of you than a sparrow's, by as much as it is bigger and takes up a

bigger place. And so you would make your parts present piecemeal to the parts of the world—large parts to the large, small parts to the small. But it is not so. You had not yet lit up my darkness.

7.2.3 Against those deceived deceivers and talkative mutes—mute, since your Word did not sound from them—it was enough for me, Lord; it was enough, that argument Nebridius used to put forward long ago, back in Carthage, which shook all of us who heard it. What would that race of darkness—whatever it is—which they set against you as an opposing mass, have done to you if you had refused to fight it? If the answer was that it would have done you some harm, then you would be violable and corruptible.[1] But if they said it could have done you no harm, they would give no reason for fighting—and for fighting in such a way that some portion of you, a limb of yours, offspring of your very substance, was mixed up with hostile powers and natures not created by you, and was so corrupted by them and changed for the worse that it was turned from happiness into misery and needed help to be rescued and cleansed. This, they say, is the soul; and your Word comes to its aid, free to help it in its slavery, pure to help it in its defilement, whole to help it in its corruption—and yet the Word too is corruptible, since it is of one and the same substance. So if they said that you, whatever you are—that is, your substance, by which you are—are incorruptible, then all those other claims were false and abominable; but if they said you were corruptible, that very statement was false and to be rejected at the first word. This, then, was enough against them: they deserved to be vomited up by every means from my oppressed heart, since they had no way out without horrible sacrilege of heart and tongue, thinking and saying such things about you.

1 The "race of darkness" is the Manichees' evil principle, which they set against God as an equal opposing power.

WHERE DOES EVIL COME FROM?

Augustine wrestles with where evil comes from if a good God made all things.

7.3.4 But even I, at that time—although I said, and firmly believed, that our Lord, the true God, who made not only our souls but our bodies too, and not only our souls and bodies but everyone and everything, could not be defiled or altered or changed in any part—still did not grasp the cause of evil, untangled and made plain. Whatever it was, though, I saw that I had to seek it in a way that would not force me to believe the unchangeable God changeable, lest I myself become the very evil I was looking for. So I sought it without anxiety, certain that what those people said was not true, whom I fled with my whole mind. For I saw that in asking where evil comes from, they were full of malice, since they preferred to think that your substance suffers evil rather than that their own does evil.

7.3.5 I strained to see what I had heard: that the free choice of the will is the cause of our doing evil, and your just judgment the cause of our suffering it. But I could not see it clearly. I tried to lift my mind's eye out of the depths, and sank again; I tried often, and sank again and again. What lifted me toward your light was this: I knew I had a will as surely as I knew I was alive. So when I willed or did not will something, I was utterly certain that it was I and no one else who willed or did not will it, and I was coming to see more and more that the cause of my sin lay there. But what I did against my will, I saw that I suffered rather than did, and I judged it not a fault but a penalty; and, thinking of you as just, I was quick to admit that I was not unjustly punished by it. But then again I would say: "Who made me? Was it not my God, who is not only good but goodness itself? "Where, then, does my willing evil and not willing good come from? Is it so that I might justly pay the penalty? Who put this in me, and planted in me this seedbed of bitterness, when I was made entirely by my most sweet God? If the devil is the author, where

does the devil himself come from? And if he too was turned from a good angel into a devil by a perverse will, where did the evil will come from in him, by which he became a devil, when the whole angel had been made by a Creator who is supremely good?" Under these thoughts I was pushed down again and choked. But I was not dragged down to that hell of error where no one confesses to you, since there it is thought that you suffer evil rather than that human beings do it.

7.4.6 For I was striving to find the rest in the same way as I had already found that the incorruptible is better than the corruptible; and so I confessed that you, whatever you were, were incorruptible. For no soul ever could, or ever will be able to, conceive of anything better than you, who are the supreme and highest good. And since the incorruptible is most truly and most certainly to be ranked above the corruptible, as I already ranked it, I could in thought have reached something better than my God—if you were not incorruptible. There, then, where I saw that the incorruptible is to be preferred to the corruptible, I ought to have sought you, and from there to have worked out where evil is—that is, where corruption itself comes from, by which your substance can in no way be harmed. For corruption in no way at all harms our God—not by any will, any necessity, any unforeseen chance—since he is God, and what he wills for himself is good, and he himself is that very good; but to be corrupted is not good. Nor are you forced into anything against your will, because your will is not greater than your power. It would be greater only if you were greater than yourself; for the will and the power of God are God himself. And what can be unforeseen to you, who know all things? No nature exists except because you know it. But why do we say so much about why the substance that is God is not corruptible, when, if it were, it would not be God?

7.5.7 I was asking where evil comes from, and I was asking in an evil way, and I did not see the evil in my very asking. I set before my spirit's gaze the whole creation: whatever we can see in it—earth and sea and air and stars and trees and mortal

animals—and whatever we do not see in it, such as the firmament of heaven above, and all the angels and all its spiritual beings. But even these my imagination arranged in their various places as if they were bodies. And I made your creation into one great mass, divided up by kinds of bodies—both those that really were bodies and those I had imagined in place of spirits. I made it great—not as great as it was, which I could not know, but as great as I pleased—though bounded, of course, on every side. And you, Lord, I pictured surrounding and penetrating it on every side, but infinite in every direction. It was as if there were a sea everywhere, stretching on all sides through immensity, nothing but one infinite sea, and it held within it a sponge, as large as you like but still finite: that sponge would surely be filled in every part by the immeasurable sea. So I thought your finite creation was full of you, the infinite, and I said: Here is God, and here is what God created. God is good, and far, far surpasses these things in power and greatness; but still, being good, he created good things—and see how he surrounds and fills them. Where, then, is evil? Where does it come from, and how did it creep in here? What is its root, and what its seed? Or does it not exist at all? Then why do we fear and guard against what does not exist? Or if our fear is groundless, surely the fear itself is an evil, goading and tormenting the heart for nothing—and an evil all the worse, since there is nothing to fear, and yet we fear. So either there is an evil that we fear, or the evil is that we fear. Where, then, does it come from, since God, who is good, made all these things good? He, the greater and supreme good, made lesser goods; but still, creator and created alike, all are good. Where does evil come from? Was there some evil matter from which he made things, which he shaped and ordered, but left something in it that he did not turn into good? Why that too? Was he unable to turn and change the whole of it so that no evil remained, when he is almighty? Finally, why did he want to make anything from it at all, and not rather, by that same almighty power, make it not exist at all? Or could it exist against his will? Or if it was eternal, why did he let it be that way for so

long, through the infinite stretches of past time, and then so much later decide to make something out of it? Or if he suddenly wanted to act, would not the almighty rather have acted so that it would not exist, and he alone would be, the whole, true, supreme, and infinite good? Or if it was not good that he who was good should not also fashion and found something good, why did he not remove that evil matter and reduce it to nothing, and himself establish good matter from which to create all things? For he would not be almighty if he could not found anything good without the help of matter he had not founded himself. Such things I turned over in my wretched heart, weighed down with the most gnawing cares by the fear of death and by not having found the truth. Yet the faith of your Christ, our Lord and Savior, as held in the Catholic Church, stayed firmly fixed in my heart. In many respects it was still unformed and drifting from the rule of doctrine; yet my mind did not abandon it, but drank it in more and more every day.

ASTROLOGY REFUTED

Augustine finally rejects astrology after hearing about twins born under the same stars with different fates.

7.6.8 By now I had also rejected the deceitful predictions and impious ravings of the astrologers. Let your mercies confess to you for this too, my God, from the inmost depths of my soul! For it was you, entirely you—for who else calls us back from the death of every error but the life that cannot die, and the wisdom that lights up needy minds while needing no light itself, the wisdom by which the world is governed, down to the fluttering leaves of the trees?—it was you who took care of my stubbornness. I had fought against Vindicianus, a shrewd old man, and Nebridius, a young man of wonderful spirit: the first declared vehemently, and the second said often, though with some hesitation, that there is no art of foreseeing the future; that human guesses often have the force of chance; and that by saying many things, people say many things that will come true, without

knowing it themselves, simply stumbling on them by not keeping quiet. So you provided a man who was a friend—no lazy consulter of astrologers, and not well versed in their literature, but, as I said, a curious consulter—who nevertheless knew something he said he had heard from his father; how much it would do to overturn belief in that art, he did not know. This man, Firminus by name, had a liberal education and was well trained in eloquence. He consulted me, as a very dear friend, about certain affairs of his in which his worldly hopes had swelled, asking what I thought according to what they call his constellations. By then I had begun to lean toward Nebridius's view on the matter. I did not refuse to make a guess and say what occurred to my wavering mind, but I did add that I was now almost persuaded that these things were ridiculous and empty. Then he told me that his father had been extremely curious about such books, and had had a friend who pursued them just as eagerly and alongside him. With equal zeal, and comparing notes, they fanned the fire of their hearts over these trifles, so that they even observed the moments of birth of dumb animals, if any gave birth in their houses, and noted the position of the sky at those moments, in order to gather experimental evidence for this so-called art.[2] So he said he had heard from his father that when Firminus's mother was pregnant with him, a slave woman belonging to that friend of his father's was also growing big with child at the same time. This could not escape her master, who took care to know even when his dogs gave birth, with the most minute attention. And so it happened that while the one man counted the days, hours, and smaller fractions of hours for his wife, and the other for his slave woman, with the most careful observation, both women gave birth at the same moment—so that they were compelled to cast the same horoscope, down to the same minutes, for each newborn: the one for his son, the other for his little slave. For when the women began to go into labor, the two men informed each other what was happening in

2 "Constellations" here means the horoscope: the positions of the stars at the moment of a person's birth.

each one's house, and had messengers ready to send to one another, so that each would be told of the birth the moment it happened. That it should be announced instantly they had easily arranged, as each was master in his own domain. And the messengers sent by each, he said, met each other at a point so exactly equidistant from the two houses that neither man could note any other position of the stars or any other fraction of a moment. And yet Firminus, born to a high station among his people, ran along the brighter roads of the world, grew in wealth, and was raised to honors; while that slave served his masters, the yoke of his condition not loosened in the least—as Firminus himself, who knew him, reported.

7.6.9 When I heard this and believed it—for such was the man who told it—all my resistance gave way and collapsed. First I tried to call Firminus himself back from that curiosity. I told him that, had I examined his constellations in order to tell him the truth, I ought certainly to have seen there parents who were leading figures among their own people, a noble family in its own city, free birth, a respectable upbringing, and a liberal education. But if that slave had consulted me on the same constellations—for they were his as well—then, to tell him the truth too, I ought to have seen there a family of the lowest kind, a slave's condition, and everything else utterly unlike the first case and far removed from it. So, looking at the same things, I would have to say different things if I spoke truly; if I said the same things, I would speak falsely. From this I concluded with complete certainty that whatever true things are said from examining constellations are said not by skill but by luck, and whatever false things, not from lack of skill but because luck lied.

7.6.10 With this opening gained, I went on chewing such things over by myself. I did not want any of those same madmen who pursued that trade—whom I already longed to attack and refute with ridicule—to resist me by claiming that Firminus had told me lies, or his father had told him. So I turned my attention to those who are born twins. Most of them come out of the womb one after the other with so small an interval of time between

them that, however much force they claim it has in the nature of things, it cannot be caught by human observation, and cannot possibly be recorded in the figures the astrologer will examine in order to pronounce the truth. And his pronouncements will not be true, because, looking at the same figures, he would have had to say the same things about Esau and about Jacob; yet the same things did not happen to both. So he would speak falsely; or if he spoke truly, he would not say the same things—yet he would be looking at the same figures. So it would be not by skill but by luck that he spoke truly.[3] For you, Lord, most just ruler of the universe, by a hidden prompting of which both consulters and consulted know nothing, bring it about that each person consulting hears what he ought to hear, according to the hidden merits of souls, out of the abyss of your just judgment. Let no one say to you, "What is this?" or "Why this?" Let him not say it, let him not say it: he is only human.

7.7.11 So by now, my helper, you had freed me from those chains, and I was asking where evil comes from, and there was no way out. But you did not let any waves of thought carry me away from the faith by which I believed that you exist, that your substance is unchangeable, that you care for human beings and judge them, and that in Christ, your Son, our Lord, and in the holy Scriptures commended by the authority of your Catholic Church, you had laid down the way of human salvation to the life that is to come after this death. With these things safe and unshakably strengthened in my mind, I was asking, in a fever, where evil comes from. What torments my heart suffered in its labor, what groans, my God! And your ears were there, though I did not know it. And when I searched hard in silence, the silent anguish of my mind was a great cry to your mercy. You knew what I was suffering, and no human being did. For how little of it was put into words by my tongue for the ears of my closest friends! Did the tumult of my soul, for which neither time nor my mouth was enough, reach their ears? Yet all of it went into your hearing, all that "I roared out from the groaning of my

3 Esau and Jacob, twin sons of Isaac whose lives went very differently (Genesis 25).

heart; and my desire was before you, and the light of my eyes was not with me." For that light was within, and I was outside; and it was not in a place. But I was intent on things contained in places, and I found no place there to rest. Those things did not take me in so that I could say, "It is enough, and it is well," nor did they let me go back to where it would be well enough for me. For I was higher than they, but lower than you; and you are my true joy when I am subject to you, and you had subjected to me the things you created below me.[4] And this was the right balance, the middle region of my well-being: to remain in your image and, serving you, to rule the body. But when I rose proudly against you, and "ran against the Lord with the thick neck of my shield," even these lowest things were set above me and pressed me down, and nowhere was there relief or room to breathe. When I looked, they rushed at me from every side in heaps and masses; when I thought, the images of bodies themselves blocked my way back, as if to say, "Where are you going, unworthy and filthy?" And these had grown out of my wound, for you humbled the proud like one wounded. I was cut off from you by my own swelling, and my face, too puffed up, closed my eyes.[5]

7.8.12 But you, Lord, "remain forever," and you are not angry with us forever, for you have taken pity on earth and ashes. It pleased you, in your sight, to reshape what was misshapen in me. You kept stirring me with inward goads, so that I could not rest until you were certain to me by my inner sight. And my swelling went down under the hidden hand of your healing, and my mind's eye, troubled and darkened, was being healed day by day by the stinging salve of healthy pains.[6]

4 Psalm 38:8–10.
5 Job 15:26, in the Old Latin version; "you humbled the proud like one wounded" echoes Psalm 89:10.
6 Psalm 102:12; Psalm 85:5.

THE PLATONIST BOOKS

Augustine reads Platonist books that teach the eternal Word but not the Word made flesh.

7.9.13 First, you wanted to show me how you resist the proud but give grace to the humble, and with what great mercy you have shown human beings the way of humility, in that your Word became flesh and dwelt among them. So through a certain man, swollen with monstrous pride, you procured for me some books of the Platonists, translated from Greek into Latin. And there I read—not in these words, of course, but exactly the same thing, argued by many different kinds of reasoning—that "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him nothing was made. What was made is life in him, and the life was the light of human beings; and the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not grasp it."[7] And that the human soul, though it "bears witness to the light," is not itself the light, but the Word, God, is "the true light that enlightens every human being coming into this world"; and that "he was in this world, and the world was made through him, and the world did not know him." But that "he came to his own, and his own did not receive him; but to all who did receive him he gave the power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name"—this I did not read there.[8]

7.9.14 Again, I read there that the Word, God, "was born not of flesh, not of blood, not of the will of a man nor of the will of the flesh, but of God." But that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us," I did not read there.[9] I did track down in those writings, said in various ways and in many forms, that the Son, being "in the form of the Father, did not think equality with God

7 The "books of the Platonists" were probably works of Plotinus and Porphyry in the Latin translation of Marius Victorinus. John 1:1–5.
8 John 1:7–12. In John, the one who "bears witness to the light" is John the Baptist.
9 John 1:13–14.

something to be seized," because by nature he is that very thing. But that "he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, made in the likeness of human beings and found in appearance as a man; he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross; therefore God raised him from the dead and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that the Lord Jesus is in the glory of God the Father"—this those books do not contain.[10] That your only-begotten Son, coeternal with you, remains unchangeably before all times and above all times; and that souls "receive of his fullness" so as to be happy, and are renewed by sharing in the wisdom that remains in itself so as to be wise—that is there. But that in time "he died for the ungodly," and that you "did not spare your only Son but handed him over for us all"—that is not there. For "you have hidden these things from the wise and revealed them to little ones," so that "those who labor and are burdened" might come to him and he might refresh them, since he is "gentle and humble of heart"; and "he guides the gentle in judgment and teaches the meek his ways," seeing "our lowliness and our toil," and forgiving "all our sins."[11] But those who strut on the high boots, as it were, of a loftier teaching do not hear him saying, "Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Even if they know God, "they do not glorify him as God or give thanks, but become futile in their thoughts, and their senseless heart is darkened; claiming to be wise, they have become fools."[12]

7.9.15 And so I also read there of the glory of your incorruption "changed into idols" and various images, "into the likeness of the image of corruptible man, and of birds and four-footed beasts and serpents"—that is, the Egyptian food for which Esau lost his birthright. For your firstborn people honored the head of a four-footed beast instead of you, turning back in their heart

10 Philippians 2:6–11.
11 Romans 5:6; Romans 8:32; Matthew 11:25, 28–29; Psalm 25:9, 18.
12 The high boot (cothurnus) was worn by tragic actors.

to Egypt, and bowing your image, their own soul, before the image of "a calf that eats hay." I found these things there, and I did not eat them. For it pleased you, Lord, to take away from Jacob the disgrace of being the lesser, so that "the elder would serve the younger"; and you called the Gentiles into your inheritance. And I had come to you from the Gentiles, and I set my mind on the gold which you wanted your people to carry away from Egypt, since it was yours wherever it was.[13] And you said to the Athenians through your apostle that "in you we live and move and have our being," as some of their own writers have said—and those books certainly came from there. And I paid no attention to the idols of the Egyptians, which were served with your gold by those who "exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator."[14]

THE UNCHANGEABLE LIGHT

Turning inward, Augustine glimpses an unchangeable light above his mind but cannot remain there.

7.10.16 Prompted by these books to return to myself, I entered my inmost self with you as my guide; and I was able to, because you had become my helper. I entered, and with the eye of my soul, such as it was, I saw above that same eye of my soul, above my mind, an unchangeable light. It was not this ordinary light visible to all flesh, nor a larger light of the same kind, as if this light were to shine much, much more brightly and fill everything with its greatness. It was not that, but something else, something very different from all these. Nor was it above my mind as oil is above water, or as the sky is above the earth; it was higher because it made me, and I was lower because I was made by it. Whoever knows the truth knows this light, and whoever knows

13 Genesis 25:29–34 (Esau's lentils, reputedly an Egyptian dish); Psalm 106:20; Romans 9:12. The Israelites' taking the Egyptians' gold (Exodus 3:22) was a traditional image for Christian use of pagan learning.
14 Acts 17:28.

it knows eternity. Love knows it. O eternal truth, and true love, and beloved eternity! You are my God; to you I sigh day and night. When I first knew you, you lifted me up so that I might see that there was something to see, and that I was not yet one who could see it. And you beat back the weakness of my sight, shining on me powerfully, and I trembled with love and dread. And I found that I was far from you, in a region of unlikeness, as if I heard your voice from on high: "I am the food of the full-grown. Grow, and you will feed on me.[15] "Nor will you change me into yourself, like the food of your flesh; you will be changed into me." And I knew that "you have disciplined man for his iniquity, and made my soul waste away like a spider's web." And I said, "Is truth then nothing, since it is not spread through space, either finite or infinite?" And you cried from far off, "I am who I am." And I heard it, as one hears in the heart, and there was no room at all for me to doubt. I could more easily doubt that I was alive than that truth exists, truth "which is clearly seen, being understood through the things that are made."[16]

7.11.17 And I looked at the other things below you, and I saw that they neither wholly are nor wholly are not. They are, since they are from you; they are not, since they are not what you are. For that truly is which remains unchangeably. But for me, "it is good to cling to God," because if I do not remain in him, I cannot remain in myself either. But he, "remaining in himself, makes all things new"; and "you are my Lord, since you have no need of my goods."[17]

WHATEVER EXISTS IS GOOD

Augustine concludes that everything that exists is good and that evil is a turning of the will.

7.12.18 And it was made clear to me that the things that are corrupted are good. They could not be corrupted if they were

15 "Region of unlikeness": a phrase from the Platonist tradition (Plotinus, Enneads 1.8.13), for the soul's distance from God.
16 Psalm 39:11; Exodus 3:14; Romans 1:20.

supremely good, nor if they were not good at all. For if they were supremely good, they would be incorruptible; but if they were not good at all, there would be nothing in them to be corrupted. For corruption does harm, and unless it diminished some good, it would do no harm. So either corruption harms nothing, which cannot be, or—and this is most certain—all things that are corrupted are deprived of some good. But if they are deprived of all good, they will not exist at all. For if they still exist and can no longer be corrupted, they will be better, because they will remain incorruptibly. And what could be more absurd than to say that things become better by losing all their good? So if they are deprived of all good, they will be nothing at all. Therefore, as long as they exist, they are good. Therefore whatever exists is good; and that evil whose origin I was seeking is not a substance, because if it were a substance, it would be good. For either it would be an incorruptible substance—certainly a great good—or it would be a corruptible substance, which would not be corruptible unless it were good. So I saw, and it was made clear to me, that you made all things good, and that there are no substances whatever that you did not make. And because you did not make all things equal, that is why all things exist: each one is good, and all of them together are very good, for "our God made all things very good."[18]

7.13.19 For you, evil does not exist at all—and not only for you, but not for your creation as a whole either, since there is nothing outside it that could break in and corrupt the order you have imposed on it. Among its parts, however, some things are thought evil because they do not fit with certain others; and those same things do not fit with others, and yet are good, and are good in themselves. And all these things that do not fit with one another do fit the lower part of the universe, which we call the earth, with its own cloudy and windy sky suited to it. Far be it from me now to say, "These things should not exist." For even if I saw only these, I would indeed long for better things, but

17 Psalm 73:28; Wisdom 7:27; Psalm 16:2.
18 Genesis 1:31.

even for these alone I ought to praise you. For they show that you are to be praised: "from the earth, sea monsters and all the depths, fire, hail, snow, ice, the stormy wind that carries out your word, mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild beasts and all cattle, creeping things and winged birds; kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all judges of the earth, young men and young women, the old together with the young—let them praise your name." And since from the heavens too they praise you, let them praise you, our God: "in the heights, all your angels, all your hosts, sun and moon, all the stars and light, the heaven of heavens and the waters above the heavens—let them praise your name."[19] I no longer longed for better things, because I was thinking of them all. With sounder judgment I weighed it up: the higher things are indeed better than the lower, but all things together are better than the higher things alone.

7.14.20 There is no health in those who are displeased by anything in your creation, just as there was none in me when many of the things you made displeased me. And because my soul did not dare to be displeased with my God, it refused to count as yours whatever displeased it. From there it had wandered into the theory of two substances, and it found no rest, and spoke like a stranger. Coming back from that, it had made itself a god spread through the infinite expanses of all places, and had thought this god was you, and had enshrined it in its heart; and so it had once again become a temple of its own idol, abominable to you. But afterward you cradled my head, though I did not know it, and closed my eyes so that they would not look on vanity. I let go of myself a little, and my madness was lulled to sleep; and I woke up in you, and saw you infinite in another way—and that sight did not come from the flesh.[20]

7.15.21 Then I looked back at other things, and saw that they owe their existence to you, and that all things are bounded in you—but in another way: not as in a place, but because you hold

19 Psalm 148:1–12.

20 The Manichee doctrine of two opposed substances, one good and one evil.

all things in the hand of your truth. All things are true insofar as they exist, and falsehood is nothing except when something is thought to exist that does not. And I saw that each thing fits not only its own place but also its own time; and that you, who alone are eternal, did not begin to work after countless stretches of time, since no stretches of time, whether those that have passed or those that will pass, would either go or come unless you were working and abiding.

7.16.22 And I knew from experience that it is no wonder that bread, pleasant to a healthy palate, is torment to an unhealthy one, and that light, lovely to clear eyes, is hateful to sore ones. Your justice displeases the wicked—let alone the viper and the worm, which you created good, suited to the lower parts of your creation. The wicked themselves are suited to those lower parts, the more unlike you they are, but suited to the higher parts the more like you they become. And I asked what wickedness was, and I found that it is not a substance, but a perversity of the will, twisted away from the supreme substance—from you, God—toward the lowest things, throwing away its own inner life and swelling outward.

7.17.23 And I marveled that I now loved you, and not a phantom in place of you. Yet I did not stand still to enjoy my God: I was swept up to you by your beauty, and soon torn away from you by my own weight, and I crashed back into these lower things with a groan; and this weight was the habit of the flesh. But the memory of you was with me, and I had no doubt at all that there was one to whom I should cling—only that I was not yet one who could cling. For "the body that decays weighs down the soul, and its earthly dwelling presses down the mind that ponders many things." And I was entirely certain that "your invisible things, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood through the things that are made—your eternal power and divinity as well."[21] For I was asking on what basis I approved the beauty of bodies, whether heavenly or earthly, and what I had at hand that let me judge soundly about changeable

21 Wisdom 9:15.

things and say, "This ought to be so, that ought not." Asking this, then—what I was judging by when I judged in this way—I had found the unchangeable and true eternity of truth above my changeable mind. And so, step by step, I rose from bodies to the soul that senses through the body; and from there to its inner power, to which the bodily senses report what is outside, which is as far as beasts can go; and from there again to the reasoning power, to which whatever is received from the bodily senses is referred for judgment. This power too, finding itself changeable in me, lifted itself up to its own understanding. It drew its thinking away from habit, withdrawing from the clamoring swarms of phantoms, to discover what light it was bathed in when it cried out without any doubt that the unchangeable is to be preferred to the changeable, and how it knew the unchangeable itself (for unless it somehow knew it, it could never have set it above the changeable with certainty). And in the flash of a trembling glance it arrived at that which is. Then indeed I saw "your invisible things, understood through the things that are made." But I could not hold my gaze fixed. My weakness was beaten back, I was returned to my usual ways, and I carried nothing with me but a loving memory—a longing, as it were, for something whose fragrance I had caught but which I could not yet eat.

CHRIST THE MEDIATOR

Augustine recognizes he lacked the humility to accept Christ as the mediator between God and humanity.

7.18.24 I looked for a way to gain the strength I needed to enjoy you, and I did not find it until I embraced "the mediator between God and humanity, the man Christ Jesus," "who is over all, God blessed forever," who calls and says, "I am the way of truth, and the life," and who mingled with flesh the food I was too weak to take. For "the Word became flesh," so that your wisdom, through which you created all things, might become milk for our infancy. I was not humble, and so I did not hold on to my

humble God, Jesus; nor did I know what his weakness was meant to teach.[22] For your Word, the eternal Truth, towering above the higher parts of your creation, raises to himself those who submit. But in the lower parts he built himself a humble house of our clay, through which to pull down from themselves those who were to be brought to submission and carry them over to himself—healing their swollen pride and nourishing their love—so that they would not go further in self-confidence, but rather become weak, seeing at their feet the Godhead made weak by sharing our garment of skin; so that, worn out, they would throw themselves down upon it, and it would rise and lift them up.[23]

7.19.25 But I thought otherwise. I thought of Christ my Lord only as a man of surpassing wisdom whom no one could equal—especially because, wonderfully born of a virgin to set an example of despising temporal things for the sake of gaining immortality, he seemed through God's care for us to have earned such great authority as a teacher. But what mystery lay in "the Word became flesh" I could not even guess. I had only gathered from what has been handed down in writing about him—that he ate and drank, slept, walked, rejoiced, grieved, and conversed—that this flesh had not been joined to your Word except together with a human soul and mind. Everyone knows this who knows the unchangeableness of your Word, which I already knew as far as I could, and about which I had no doubt at all. For now to move the limbs of the body by will, now not to move them; now to be stirred by some feeling, now not; now to utter wise sayings through signs, now to keep silent—these are the marks of a soul and mind that change. If what is written about him in this regard were false, everything else would be endangered by the lie, and no saving faith would remain for the human race in those writings. So, since what is written is true, I recognized a whole human being in Christ: not just a man's body, nor a body

22 1 Timothy 2:5; Romans 9:5; John 14:6.

23 The "garment of skin" recalls the garments God made for Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:21), an image of mortal flesh.

with a soul but no mind, but a real man. Yet I thought he surpassed all others not because he was the Truth in person, but because of some great excellence of his human nature and a more perfect share in wisdom. Alypius, on the other hand, thought Catholics believed God was clothed in flesh in such a way that there was nothing in Christ besides God and flesh; he did not think they taught that there was a human soul and mind in him. And because he was firmly convinced that the things recorded of him could not have been done without a living and rational creature, he moved rather sluggishly toward the Christian faith itself. But later, learning that this was the error of the Apollinarian heretics, he rejoiced in the Catholic faith and came into harmony with it. As for me, I confess that it was somewhat later that I learned how, on "the Word became flesh," Catholic truth is distinguished from the falsehood of Photinus. For the refutation of heretics makes what your Church holds, and what sound doctrine contains, stand out clearly. "For there had to be heresies, so that those who are approved might be made manifest" among the weak.[24]

7.20.26 But at that time, having read those books of the Platonists and been prompted by them to seek a truth without body, I saw "your invisible things, understood through the things that are made." Though beaten back, I sensed what the darkness of my soul would not let me contemplate. I was certain that you exist and are infinite, yet are not spread out through finite or infinite places; that you truly are, you who are always the same, not other or otherwise in any part or by any motion; and that all other things are from you, on this single, most solid proof: that they exist. Of these things I was certain, yet far too weak to enjoy you. I chattered away as if I were an expert; but had I not sought your way in Christ our Savior, I would have been not expert but expiring. For I had begun to want to be thought wise, though I was full of my own punishment; and I did not weep—

24 Apollinaris of Laodicea (4th century AD) denied that Christ had a human mind; Photinus, bishop of Sirmium (4th century AD), taught that Christ was a mere man. The quotation is 1 Corinthians 11:19.

worse, I was "puffed up with knowledge."[25] For where was that love which builds on the foundation of humility, which is Christ Jesus? Or when would those books have taught it to me? I believe you wanted me to stumble upon them before I studied your Scriptures precisely so that the way they had affected me would be pressed into my memory. Then later, when I had been tamed by your books and my wounds were being handled by your healing fingers, I would discern and distinguish the difference between presumption and confession—between those who see where they must go but do not see the way, and the way that leads to the blessed homeland, not only to be seen but to be lived in. For if I had first been formed by your holy writings, and you had grown sweet to me through close familiarity with them, and I had afterward come across those volumes, perhaps they would have torn me from the solid ground of devotion; or, if I had held firm in the healthy disposition I had absorbed, I might have thought that it could be gained from those books too, if one studied them alone.

READING PAUL

Augustine reads Paul and finds there the Platonists' truths joined with grace and humility.

7.21.27 So I seized with the greatest eagerness the venerable pen of your Spirit, and above all the apostle Paul. And those problems vanished in which it had once seemed to me that he contradicted himself, and that the text of his words did not agree with the testimony of the Law and the Prophets. The single face of those pure words appeared to me, and I learned to "rejoice with trembling." I began, and I found that whatever truth I had read there is said here together with the commendation of your grace: so that whoever sees should not boast as if he had not received—not only what he sees, but even the ability to see (for "what does he have that he did not receive?");[26] and so that he

25 1 Corinthians 8:1.
26 Psalm 2:11; 1 Corinthians 4:7.

may be not only urged to see you, who are always the same, but also healed so as to hold you; and so that whoever cannot see from far off may still walk the road by which to come, and see, and hold. For even if a person "delights in the law of God in the inner self," what will he do about the other law in his members, which wars against the law of his mind and takes him captive under the law of sin that is in his members? For you are just, Lord, but we have sinned, we have done wrong, we have acted wickedly, and your hand has been heavy upon us; and justly have we been handed over to the ancient sinner, the ruler of death, because he persuaded our will to become like his own will, by which he did not stand firm in your truth. What will a wretched man do?[27] "Who will deliver him from the body of this death," except your grace through Jesus Christ our Lord, whom you begot coeternal with yourself and created "at the beginning of your ways"? In him "the ruler of this world" found nothing worthy of death, and yet he killed him; and "the record that stood against us was canceled." Those writings do not have this. Those pages do not have the face of this devotion: the tears of confession, your sacrifice, "a troubled spirit, a broken and humbled heart," the salvation of the people, the Bride, the City, the pledge of the Holy Spirit, the cup of our ransom. No one there sings, "Shall not my soul be subject to God? For from him comes my salvation. He is my God and my salvation, my protector; I shall not be moved any more." No one there hears him calling, "Come to me, you who labor." They scorn to learn from him, because he is gentle and humble of heart.[28] For you have "hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to little ones." It is one thing to see the homeland of peace from a wooded peak and not find the road to it, struggling in vain through trackless country, beset and ambushed on every side by fugitive deserters under their chief, the lion and the dragon. It is quite another to keep to the road that leads there, guarded by the care of the heavenly Emperor, where those who

27 Romans 7:22–23.
28 Romans 7:24–25; Proverbs 8:22; John 14:30; Colossians 2:14; Psalm 62:1–2.

have deserted the heavenly army do not lie in wait to rob—for they shun that road like torture. These things sank into my very depths in wonderful ways as I read "the least of your apostles"; and I had considered your works, and trembled.[29]

29 1 Corinthians 15:9; Habakkuk 3:2.

Book VIII

Conversion in the garden
Stories of other conversions lead to Augustine's own conversion in a Milan garden.

8.1.1 My God, let me remember with thanksgiving and confess your mercies toward me. Let my bones be steeped in your love and say, "Lord, who is like you?" "You have broken my chains; let me offer you a sacrifice of praise." How you broke them I will tell, and all who worship you, when they hear it, will say, "Blessed be the Lord in heaven and on earth; great and wonderful is his name." Your words had stuck fast in my heart, and I was hemmed in by you on every side. Of your eternal life I was certain, though I had seen it "in a riddle, as in a mirror." Every doubt had been taken from me about incorruptible substance, and that all substance comes from it; and I desired not to be more certain of you, but more steadfast in you. But as for my life in time, everything was wavering, and my heart had to be cleansed of "the old leaven."[1]

SIMPLICIANUS

Augustine seeks advice from the aged priest Simplicianus about his inner turmoil.

The Way, the Savior himself, pleased me, but I was still reluctant to pass through its narrow places. And you put it into my mind, and it seemed good in my sight, to go to Simplicianus, who appeared to me a good servant of yours; your grace shone in

1 Psalm 116:16–17; 1 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Corinthians 5:7.

him. I had also heard that from his youth he had lived for you most devoutly. By then he had grown old, and after a long life spent with such good zeal in following your way, he seemed to me to have experienced much and learned much—and so indeed he had. So as I talked over my turmoil with him, I wanted him to tell me the right way for someone in my state to walk in your way.[2]

8.1.2 For I saw the Church full, and one person went this way, another that. But I was unhappy with what I was doing in the world, and it had become a heavy burden to me, now that my cravings no longer burned as they used to with the hope of honor and money to make me put up with so heavy a slavery. For those things no longer delighted me in comparison with your sweetness and "the beauty of your house, which I have loved." But I was still tightly bound by a woman. The apostle did not forbid me to marry, though he urged something better, wishing above all that everyone were as he himself was. But I, being weaker, chose the softer place, and because of this one thing I was tossed about in everything else, listless and wasting away with withering cares; for in other matters too, which I did not want to endure, I was forced to conform to married life, to which I was given over and bound.[3] I had heard from the mouth of Truth that there are eunuchs who have made themselves so for the sake of the kingdom of heaven; but, he says, "let whoever can accept this accept it." Surely "all people are futile in whom there is no knowledge of God, and who could not, from the good things that are seen, find him who is." But I was no longer in that futility. I had risen above it, and with the whole creation bearing witness I had found you, our Creator, and your Word, God with you and one God with you, through whom you created all things. And there is another kind of ungodly people: those who "knowing God, did not glorify him as God or give thanks."[4] Into

2 Simplicianus, a priest at Milan who had instructed Ambrose, later succeeded him as bishop (AD 397).
3 Psalm 26:8; 1 Corinthians 7:7.
4 Wisdom 13:1.

this too I had fallen, and your right hand took hold of me; you lifted me out and set me where I might recover. For you said to humankind, "See: piety is wisdom," and, "Do not wish to seem wise, for those who called themselves wise became fools." And I had now found the good pearl, and I ought to have sold all I had and bought it—and I hesitated.[5]

THE CONVERSION OF VICTORINUS

Simplicianus tells how the famous rhetorician Victorinus publicly professed Christianity in Rome.

8.2.3 So I went to Simplicianus, who had been a father to Ambrose, then bishop, when he received grace, and whom Ambrose truly loved as a father. I told him the winding course of my wandering. When I mentioned that I had read certain books of the Platonists, translated into Latin by Victorinus, once a professor of rhetoric in the city of Rome, who I had heard had died a Christian, he congratulated me for not having fallen upon the writings of other philosophers, full of fallacies and deceptions "according to the elements of this world," whereas in these books God and his Word are suggested in every way. Then, to urge me toward the humility of Christ, hidden from the wise and revealed to little ones, he recalled Victorinus himself, whom he had known very well when he was in Rome; and what he told me about him I will not pass over in silence.[6] It deserves to be confessed to you, for it contains great praise of your grace. Here was a most learned old man, highly skilled in all the liberal arts, who had read and weighed so many works of the philosophers; the teacher of so many noble senators; a man who, for the distinction of his brilliant teaching—which the citizens of this world think the height of achievement—had earned and received a statue in the Roman Forum. Up to that age he had worshiped idols and taken part in the sacrilegious rites with

5 Matthew 13:45–46.

6 Marius Victorinus, an African-born rhetorician in Rome, converted to Christianity around AD 355.

which nearly the whole Roman nobility was then puffed up, breathing out Osiris and "monstrous gods of every kind, and barking Anubis"—gods that had once "borne arms against Neptune and Venus and against Minerva," and to which Rome, their conqueror, now prayed. For so many years old Victorinus had defended them with his thundering voice. And yet he did not blush to become a child of your Christ, an infant at your font, bowing his neck to the yoke of humility and bending his brow to the shame of the cross.[7]

8.2.4 O Lord, Lord, who bowed the heavens and came down, who touched the mountains and they smoked, by what ways did you find your way into that heart? He used to read Holy Scripture, Simplicianus said, and studied and searched all the Christian writings with great care. And he would say to Simplicianus —not openly, but privately, as a friend—"You should know that I am already a Christian." Simplicianus would answer, "I will not believe it or count you among the Christians until I see you in the church of Christ." But he would laugh and say, "So do walls make Christians?" He often said this, that he was already a Christian, and Simplicianus often gave that answer, and the joke about the walls was often repeated. For he was afraid of offending his friends, proud worshipers of demons; he thought that from the height of their Babylonian dignity, as from the cedars of Lebanon which the Lord had not yet broken, heavy hostility would come crashing down on him.[8] But after he had drawn strength from reading and eager longing, he feared that Christ would deny him before the holy angels if he were afraid to confess Christ before men. He saw himself guilty of a great crime: he was ashamed of the sacraments of your Word's humility, and not ashamed of the sacrilegious rites of proud demons, which he had taken up as their proud imitator. He lost his shame before vanity and grew ashamed before the truth; and suddenly and

7 The quoted phrases echo Virgil, Aeneid 8.698–700, on the Egyptian gods at the battle of Actium. The Latin before them is corrupt; "Osiris" follows a common emendation.

8 Psalm 144:5; Psalm 29:5.

unexpectedly he said to Simplicianus, as Simplicianus himself told it, "Let us go to the church: I want to become a Christian." Simplicianus, beside himself with joy, went with him. Once he had been instructed in the first sacraments of instruction, not long afterward he also gave in his name to be reborn through baptism, to the amazement of Rome and the joy of the Church. "The proud saw it and were angry; they gnashed their teeth and wasted away." But for your servant, "the Lord God was his hope, and he did not look to vanities and lying follies."[9]

8.2.5 At last the hour came for the profession of faith. At Rome this is usually made, in fixed words learned and held in memory, from a raised place in sight of the faithful people, by those who are about to approach your grace. Simplicianus said the presbyters offered Victorinus the chance to make it more privately, as was customarily offered to some who seemed likely to be flustered by shyness; but he preferred to profess his salvation in the sight of the holy congregation. For what he taught in rhetoric was not salvation, and yet he had professed it publicly. How much less, then, should he have feared your gentle flock when pronouncing your Word, he who had not feared crowds of madmen when pronouncing his own words? So when he went up to make his profession, all of them, each as he knew him, called out his name to one another in a clamor of congratulation (and who there did not know him?). And through the mouths of all who were rejoicing together there sounded a hushed sound: "Victorinus! Victorinus!" Quickly they broke into sound with delight, because they saw him; and quickly they fell silent with attention, so that they could hear him. He proclaimed the true faith with splendid confidence, and all of them wanted to snatch him into their hearts. And they did snatch him, by loving and rejoicing: these were the hands that snatched him.

8.3.6 Good God, what happens in a person that makes him rejoice more over the salvation of a soul that had been despaired of, and freed from greater danger, than if there had always been hope for it or the danger had been less? For you too, merciful

9 Psalm 112:10; Psalm 40:4.

Father, rejoice more over one who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance. And we listen with great delight when we hear how the sheep that had strayed is carried back on the shoulders of the rejoicing shepherd, and how the coin is returned to your treasury while the neighbors rejoice with the woman who found it; and the joy of the solemn service in your house brings us to tears when it is read in your house about your younger son, that "he was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and has been found." For you rejoice in us and in your angels, who are holy with a holy love.[10] For you are always the same, you who always know in the same way all the things that neither always exist nor exist in the same way.

8.3.7 What happens in the soul, then, that it delights more in the things it loves when they are found or restored than if it had always had them? Everything else bears witness too, and the world is full of testimony crying out, "It is so." The victorious general celebrates a triumph; he would not have won unless he had fought, and the greater the danger in battle, the greater the joy in the triumph. A storm tosses sailors and threatens shipwreck; all grow pale at the death awaiting them. Sky and sea grow calm, and they rejoice exceedingly, because they feared exceedingly. Someone dear to us is sick, and his pulse reports bad news; all who want him well are sick at heart along with him. He recovers, though he does not yet walk with his former strength—and already there is such joy as there never was before, when he walked about healthy and strong. People gain these very pleasures of human life even through troubles that do not fall on them unexpectedly and against their will, but are planned and chosen. There is no pleasure in eating and drinking unless the discomfort of hunger and thirst comes first. Drinkers eat salty snacks to produce a painful burning, and when drinking quenches it, pleasure results. And it is the custom that brides, once promised, are not handed over at once, so that the husband will not hold cheap a bride given to him whom he did not sigh for, as a bridegroom, during the delay.

10 Luke 15:7.

8.3.8 So it is in shameful and detestable pleasure; so in pleasure that is permitted and lawful; so in the most sincere and honorable friendship; so in the one who "was dead and came back to life, was lost and was found." Everywhere, greater joy is preceded by greater trouble. What does this mean, Lord my God, when you yourself are eternally your own joy, and some beings around you forever rejoice in you? What does it mean that this part of the world swings between decline and progress, between clashes and reconciliations? Is this their measure, and is this all you gave them, when from the heights of heaven to the depths of the earth, from the beginning of the ages to their end, from the angel to the worm, from the first movement to the last, you set every kind of good thing and all your just works each in its own place, and brought each about in its own time? Ah me, how high you are in the heights, and how deep in the depths! You never go away, and we hardly come back to you.

8.4.9 Come, Lord, act: rouse us and call us back, kindle us and seize us, blaze and grow sweet; let us love, let us run. Do not many return to you from a deeper pit of blindness than Victorinus did, and draw near and are enlightened, receiving the light? And those who receive it receive from you power to become your children. But if they are less known to the public, even those who know them rejoice less over them. For when joy is shared with many, each one's joy is richer too, because they warm one another and catch fire from each other. Then, too, those who are known to many carry authority with many toward salvation and lead the way for many who will follow; and so even those who went before them rejoice greatly over them, because they are not rejoicing over them alone. Far be it that in your tabernacle the rich should be favored over the poor, or the noble over the lowly, since you have rather "chosen the weak things of the world to put the strong to shame, and chosen the lowly and despised things of this world, and the things that are not as though they were, to bring to nothing the things that are." And yet that same "least of your apostles," through whose tongue you spoke those words of yours—when the proconsul

Paulus, his pride defeated by the apostle's campaign, had been sent under the gentle yoke of your Christ and become a subject of the great King—he too, formerly Saul, chose to be called Paul, as a mark of so great a victory. For the enemy is more fully defeated in someone he holds more tightly, and through whom he holds more people. And he holds the proud more tightly through the name of nobility, and through them holds more people through the name of authority.[11] So the more gladly they thought of Victorinus's heart, which the devil had held as an impregnable stronghold, and of Victorinus's tongue, the great sharp weapon with which he had slain many, the more abundantly your children had cause to rejoice. For our King had bound the strong man, and they saw his vessels snatched away, cleansed, and made fit for your honor, becoming "useful to the Lord for every good work."[12]

TWO WILLS

Augustine describes being torn between two wills, the old and the new, bound by habit.

8.5.10 But when your servant Simplicianus told me this about Victorinus, I burned to imitate him; that, indeed, was why he had told it. And he added that in the time of the emperor Julian a law was passed forbidding Christians to teach literature and oratory; and Victorinus, embracing that law, chose to abandon his school of chatter rather than your Word, by which you "make eloquent the tongues of infants." He seemed to me not so much brave as fortunate, because he found an opportunity to be free for you. For this I was sighing, bound not by another's iron but by my own iron will. The enemy held my will, and from it he had made a chain for me and bound me tight. For out of a perverse will came lust; and when lust is served, habit comes; and when habit is not resisted, necessity comes. By these links, as it

11 1 Corinthians 1:27–28. Sergius Paulus, proconsul of Cyprus, was converted by Paul (Acts 13:7–12).
12 Matthew 12:29; 2 Timothy 2:21.

were, joined one to another—which is why I called it a chain—a hard slavery held me bound.[13] But the new will that had begun in me—to worship you freely and to want to enjoy you, God, the only sure delight—was not yet strong enough to overcome the earlier will, hardened by long age. So my two wills, one old, the other new, one carnal, the other spiritual, fought with each other, and in their discord they tore my soul apart.

8.5.11 So I understood from my own experience what I had read: how "the flesh desires against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh." I was in both, but more myself in what I approved in myself than in what I disapproved. For in the latter it was now more not I, since to a great extent I suffered it unwillingly rather than did it willingly. And yet habit had grown more combative against me through my own doing, since I had willingly arrived where I did not want to be. And who could rightly object, when just punishment follows the sinner? Nor did I have any longer the excuse by which I used to tell myself that I had not yet despised the world to serve you because my grasp of the truth was uncertain; for now that too was certain. But I, still tied down to earth, refused to serve as your soldier, and I was as afraid of being freed from all my baggage as one ought to be afraid of being weighed down by it.[14]

8.5.12 So I was weighed down by the burden of the world, sweetly, as often happens in sleep; and the thoughts in which I meditated on you were like the efforts of people who want to wake up but, overcome by the depth of their slumber, sink back down. No one wants to sleep forever, and everyone of sound judgment agrees it is better to be awake; yet a person often puts off shaking off sleep when a heavy torpor lies in his limbs, and though he already dislikes it he enjoys it all the more willingly, even though the time to get up has come. In the same way I was certain that it was better to give myself up to your love than to give in to my own craving. But the one appealed to me and was

13 Julian "the Apostate," emperor AD 361–363, barred Christians from teaching the classics in AD 362. The quotation is Wisdom 10:21.
14 Galatians 5:17.

winning; the other allured me and was binding. For I had no answer to give you when you said to me, "Wake up, sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will give you light." And though you showed me on every side that what you said was true, I, convicted by the truth, had nothing at all to answer but slow and sleepy words: "Soon," "Yes, soon," "Just a little while." But "soon, soon" never came to an end, and "just a little while" went on for a long while. In vain did I delight in your law in my inner self, when another law in my members was fighting against the law of my mind and taking me captive under the law of sin that was in my members. For the law of sin is the force of habit, by which the mind is dragged along and held even against its will—deservedly, since it slipped into the habit willingly. Wretched as I was, then, who would deliver me from the body of this death, except your grace through Jesus Christ our Lord?[15]

8.6.13 Now I will tell how you released me from the chain of sexual desire, by which I was bound most tightly, and from the slavery of worldly business; and I will confess to your name, Lord, "my helper and my redeemer." I went about my usual affairs with growing anxiety, and daily I sighed for you. I went often to your church, as far as I had time free from the business under whose weight I groaned. Alypius was with me, idle from his work as a legal expert after a third term as assessor, waiting for clients to whom he could sell his advice again, just as I sold skill in speaking, if that can be supplied by teaching. Nebridius, for his part, had yielded to our friendship and agreed to serve as assistant teacher to Verecundus, a citizen of Milan and a teacher of grammar, the closest friend of us all, who urgently wanted—and by right of friendship demanded—faithful help from among our circle, for he badly needed it.[16] So it was not a craving for gain that drew Nebridius there—he could have made more from his learning, had he wished—but, most sweet and gentle friend that he was, out of the duty of kindness he would not turn down our request. He carried it out very prudently, taking care not to

15 Ephesians 5:14.

16 Psalm 19:14. Verecundus later lent Augustine his country estate at Cassiciacum.

become known to people who were great by this world's standards, and so avoiding all the disturbance of mind they would bring; for he wanted his mind free, and at leisure for as many hours as possible, to seek out, read, or hear something about wisdom.

PONTICIANUS' STORY

Ponticianus tells of Antony and two officials who abandoned their careers, shaming Augustine.

8.6.14 One day, then—I do not remember why Nebridius was away—a man named Ponticianus came to our house to see Alypius and me. He was a fellow countryman of ours, in that he was an African, and held a distinguished post at the palace. He wanted something from us, I do not know what, and we sat down to talk. By chance he noticed a book on a game table in front of us. He picked it up, opened it, and found the apostle Paul—quite unexpectedly, for he had supposed it was one of the books that I wore myself out teaching. Then he smiled and looked at me with congratulation and surprise at having suddenly found these writings, and these alone, before my eyes. For he was a Christian and a baptized believer, and often prostrated himself before you, our God, in church, in frequent and lengthy prayers. When I told him that I was devoting the greatest care to those Scriptures, a conversation began, with him doing the telling, about Antony, the Egyptian monk, whose name shone brightly among your servants but had been hidden from us until that hour. When he discovered this, he lingered on the subject, introducing so great a man to us who did not know him and marveling at this ignorance of ours. We, for our part, were astounded to hear of your wonders, so thoroughly attested, within such recent memory and almost in our own times, in the true faith and the Catholic Church. We were all amazed: we, because the

things were so great; and he, because we had never heard of them.[17]

8.6.15 From there his talk rolled on to the flocks in the monasteries, and their way of life, fragrant with your sweetness, and the fruitful wastes of the desert—of all of which we knew nothing. There was even a monastery at Milan, outside the city walls, full of good brothers under the care of Ambrose, and we had not known it. He went on and kept talking, and we sat silent and intent. Then it happened that he told how once—at Trier, it seems—while the emperor was held by the morning show at the circus, he and three companions went out for a walk in the gardens next to the walls. There, as they happened to stroll in pairs, one went off with him, and the other two likewise went off on their own. But those two, wandering about, came upon a cottage where some of your servants lived, poor in spirit, the kind to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs; and there they found a book in which the life of Antony was written.[18] One of them began to read it, and to marvel, and to catch fire; and as he read he began to think of taking up such a life, leaving his worldly service, and serving you. They were among those called "agents in affairs." Then suddenly, filled with holy love and sober shame, angry with himself, he turned his eyes on his friend and said to him: "Tell me, please, with all these labors of ours, where are we trying to get? What are we looking for? What are we serving for? Can our hope at the palace rise any higher than to be friends of the emperor? And there, what is not fragile and full of dangers? Through how many dangers do we arrive at a greater danger? And when will that even happen? But a friend of God—if I want it, look, I become one now." He said this, and, in turmoil with the labor pains of a new life, he turned his eyes back to the pages.[19] And he read, and he was changed within, where you could see, and his mind was stripped of the world, as soon

17 Antony of Egypt (c. AD 251–356), a pioneer of Christian monasticism; the Life of Antony by Athanasius was widely read.

18 Trier, on the Moselle, was then an imperial residence.

19 The agentes in rebus were imperial couriers and inspectors, a branch of the civil service with a reputation as secret police.

became clear. For while he read and the waves of his heart rolled, at times he groaned aloud; and he discerned and determined on the better course. And now yours, he said to his friend: "I have now broken away from that hope of ours, and I have resolved to serve God, and I am starting from this hour, in this place. If you are reluctant to imitate me, do not oppose me." The other replied that he would stay with him as a comrade in so great a reward and so great a service. And both, now yours, were building the tower at the proper cost: leaving everything they had and following you. Then Ponticianus and the man who was walking with him through other parts of the garden, looking for them, came to the same place, found them, and reminded them to come back, since the day was already declining. But they told of their decision and purpose, and how such a will had arisen and been made firm in them, and asked the others not to make trouble for them if they refused to join them. The other two, though in no way changed from what they had been, nevertheless wept for themselves, as he told it, and devoutly congratulated them, and commended themselves to their prayers; and dragging their hearts along the ground, they went off to the palace, while the other two, fixing their hearts on heaven, stayed in the cottage. Both of these men were engaged to be married; and when their fiancées heard of this, they too dedicated their virginity to you.

8.7.16 This was what Ponticianus told us. But you, Lord, while he was speaking, were turning me back toward myself, taking me from behind my own back, where I had put myself so as not to look at myself; and you set me before my own face, so that I would see how ugly I was, how twisted and filthy, spotted and covered with sores. I saw, and I was horrified, and there was nowhere to flee from myself. If I tried to turn my gaze away from myself, he went on telling what he was telling, and you again set me opposite myself and thrust me before my own eyes, so that I would discover my wickedness and hate it. I had known it, but I pretended not to, and held it down, and forgot it.

8.7.17 Then indeed, the more ardently I loved those men whose healthy resolve I was hearing about—that they had given themselves wholly to you to be healed—the more loathsomely I hated myself in comparison with them. For many years of mine had flowed away with me—perhaps twelve—since, in my nineteenth year, on reading Cicero's Hortensius, I had been roused to the pursuit of wisdom; and still I kept putting off scorning earthly happiness and making time to search for that wisdom, whose mere seeking, let alone its finding, should have been preferred even to finding treasures and the kingdoms of the nations and bodily pleasures flowing around me at a nod. But I, a wretched young man, very wretched, and more wretched still at the very threshold of my youth, had even asked you for chastity and said, "Give me chastity and self-control—but not yet." For I was afraid that you would hear me quickly, and quickly heal me of the disease of lust, which I preferred to have satisfied rather than extinguished. And I had gone down crooked roads in a sacrilegious superstition—not indeed sure of it, but as if preferring it to the others, which I did not seek out devoutly but attacked as an enemy.

8.7.18 I had thought that the reason I was putting off, from day to day, scorning worldly hope and following you alone was that nothing certain appeared to me by which to steer my course. And now the day had come when I was stripped bare before myself, and my conscience rebuked me: "Where is your tongue now? You used to say, of course, that because the truth was uncertain you would not throw off the baggage of vanity. Look, now it is certain, and still that baggage weighs on you, while others, with freer shoulders, grow wings—men who were not worn out with searching as you were, nor spent ten years and more pondering these things." So I was gnawed within and violently confounded with a horrible shame, while Ponticianus spoke of such things. When he had finished his story and the business for which he had come, he went away, and I went back to myself. What did I not say against myself? With what whips of argument did I not flog my soul to make it follow me as I tried to

go after you? And it balked; it refused, and it made no excuse. All its arguments were used up and refuted. What remained was a mute trembling: it dreaded, as if it were death, being held back from the flow of habit by which it was wasting away to death.

THE GARDEN IN MILAN

In a Milan garden, Augustine battles his divided will and the pull of his old desires.

8.8.19 Then, in that great quarrel of my inner house, which I had stirred up fiercely with my soul in our private chamber, my heart, troubled in face as much as in mind, I burst in on Alypius. I cry out: "What is wrong with us? What is this? What did you hear? The unlearned rise up and seize heaven, and we, with our learning—look where we wallow in flesh and blood! Is it because they have gone ahead that we are ashamed to follow, and not ashamed not even to follow?" I said something like this, and my turmoil tore me away from him, while he stared at me in stunned silence. For I did not sound like myself. My forehead, cheeks, eyes, color and tone of voice spoke my mind more than the words I uttered. There was a small garden at our lodging, which we had the use of, as of the whole house, for our host, the owner of the house, did not live there. The tumult in my breast had carried me off there, where no one would hinder the burning lawsuit I had brought against myself until it came to its end —an end you knew, but I did not. I was only going mad toward health and dying into life, aware of how bad I was and unaware of how good I was soon to be. So I withdrew into the garden, and Alypius followed step by step. For my solitude was no less mine when he was there. And when would he have deserted me in such a state? We sat down as far from the buildings as we could. I was groaning in spirit, raging with the most turbulent indignation that I did not enter into the agreement and covenant with you, my God, into which all my bones cried out that I should go, praising it to the skies. And one did not go there by ship or chariot or on foot—not even as far as I had gone from the house

to the place where we were sitting. For not only to go there but also to arrive there was nothing other than to will to go—but to will it strongly and wholly, not to twist and toss this way and that a half-wounded will, struggling as one part rises and another falls.

8.8.20 In short, in the very heat of my hesitation I did many things with my body that people sometimes want to do and cannot—if they lack the limbs themselves, or if these are bound with chains, or weakened by illness, or hindered in some other way. If I tore my hair, if I struck my forehead, if I locked my fingers and clasped my knee, I did it because I willed it. Yet I could have willed and not done it, if my limbs had not been able to move and obey. So I did many things where willing was not the same as being able; and I did not do what pleased me more, with an incomparable longing, and what I could have done as soon as I willed—because as soon as I willed, I would surely will it. For there the ability was the same as the will, and the willing itself was already the doing. And yet it was not done; and the body obeyed the slightest will of the soul, moving its limbs at a nod, more easily than the soul obeyed itself in carrying out its own great will, which could be accomplished by the will alone.

8.9.21 Where does this monstrous thing come from? And why is it so? Let your mercy shine on me, and let me ask, in case the hidden places of human punishment and the darkest sufferings of the children of Adam can answer me. Where does this monstrous thing come from? And why is it so? The mind commands the body, and it obeys at once; the mind commands itself, and it resists. The mind commands the hand to move, and it is so easy that command can hardly be told apart from obedience; yet the mind is mind, and the hand is body. The mind commands the mind to will; it is not something other, and yet it does not do it. Where does this monstrous thing come from? And why is it so, I ask, that the mind, which would not command unless it willed, commands itself to will, and does not do what it commands? But it does not will wholly; so it does not command wholly. For it commands just so far as it wills, and what it commands is not

done just so far as it does not will. For the will commands that there be a will—not another will, but itself. So it is not the full will that commands; that is why what it commands does not happen. For if it were full, it would not command itself to be, because it would already be. So it is not monstrous partly to will and partly not to will: it is a sickness of the mind, which does not rise up whole, lifted by truth but weighed down by habit. And so there are two wills, because neither of them is whole, and what is present in one is lacking in the other.

8.10.22 Let them perish from your presence, God, as they are perishing—the empty talkers and deceivers of the mind who, noticing two wills in the act of deliberating, insist that there are two natures belonging to two minds, one good, the other evil. They themselves are truly evil when they think these evil things; and these same people will be good if they think true things and consent to the truth, so that your apostle may say to them: "Once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord." For in wanting to be light, not in the Lord but in themselves, by supposing that the nature of the soul is what God is, they have become thicker darkness, since in their horrible arrogance they have gone farther away from you, the true light that enlightens every person coming into this world. Pay attention to what you are saying, and blush; come to him and be enlightened, and your faces will not blush.[20] When I was deliberating about serving the Lord my God at last, as I had long intended, it was I who willed and I who did not will: it was I. I neither fully willed nor fully refused. So I was at war with myself and was being torn apart from myself; and this tearing apart did happen against my will, yet it showed not the nature of another mind but the punishment of my own. And so it was no longer I who brought it about, but the sin that lived in me, as punishment for a sin more freely committed, because I was a son of Adam.

8.10.23 For if there are as many opposing natures as there are wills resisting each other, there will be not two but more. If

20 The Manichees. The quotation is Ephesians 5:8.

someone deliberates whether to go to their meeting or to the theater, they cry out: "Look—two natures: a good one leads this way, an evil one leads back that way. Otherwise where does this hesitation between opposing wills come from?" But I say both are evil, the one that leads to them and the one that leads back to the theater. They, however, believe that only the one by which people go to them is good. What, then, if one of us deliberates, and wavers between two wills quarreling within him, whether to go to the theater or to our church? Won't they waver too about how to answer? For either they will admit what they do not want to—that it is a good will that takes a person to our church, as those go to it who have been steeped in its sacraments and are held by them; or they will suppose that two evil natures and two evil minds clash in one person, and then their usual claim, that one is good and the other evil, will not be true; or they will turn to the truth and not deny that, when someone deliberates, a single soul is tossed about by different wills.

8.10.24 So let them no longer say, when they perceive two wills opposing each other in one person, that two opposing minds, from two opposing substances and two opposing principles, are fighting, one good and the other evil. For you, truthful God, disprove them, refute them and convict them—as in the case where both wills are evil: when someone deliberates whether to kill a man by poison or by the sword; whether to seize this estate belonging to someone else or that one, when he cannot take both; whether to buy pleasure through extravagance or keep his money through greed; whether to go to the circus or to the theater, if both are showing on the same day. I add a third: or to go and steal from someone's house, if the chance arises. And I add a fourth: or to go and commit adultery, if the opportunity opens up at the same time. If all of these come together at one moment of time, and all are desired equally, though they cannot be done at once, they tear the mind apart with four wills opposing one another—or even more, given the great abundance of things that people desire. Yet they do not usually speak of so great a multitude of different substances. So too with good wills.

For I ask them whether it is good to delight in a reading from the apostle, and whether it is good to delight in a sober psalm, and whether it is good to discuss the gospel. To each they will answer, "Good." What, then, if all of them delight us equally and at one and the same time? Do not different wills pull a person's heart apart while we deliberate which to take up first? And all of them are good, and they contend with one another until one is chosen, toward which the whole will, now single, is carried, which had been divided into many. So too when eternity delights us from above and the pleasure of a temporal good holds us back from below: it is the same soul, willing this or that, but not with a whole will; and so it is torn apart with heavy distress, as long as it puts the one first because of its truth, yet does not put the other aside because of habit.

8.11.25 So I was sick and tormented, accusing myself far more bitterly than usual, turning and twisting in my chain until it would break completely—a chain that now held me only slightly, but held me all the same. And you pressed upon me in my hidden depths, Lord, in your severe mercy, redoubling the whips of fear and shame, so that I would not give up again, leaving that thin, slight remnant unbroken, to grow strong again and bind me more tightly. For I kept saying within myself, "Let it be now, let it be now," and with the word I was already moving toward the decision. I was almost doing it, and I did not do it; yet I did not slip back into my old ways, but stood close by and caught my breath. And I tried again, and I was very nearly there, and very nearly; now, now I was touching it and holding it. And I was not there, and I was not touching it or holding it, hesitating to die to death and to live to life. What was ingrained in me had more power than the better, which was unfamiliar; and the very moment of time at which I was to become something else, the nearer it came, struck me with greater horror. But it did not drive me back or turn me away; it held me in suspense.

8.11.26 What held me back were trifles of trifles and the vanities of the vain, my old mistresses; they plucked at my garment of flesh and whispered, "Are you sending us away?" and "From this

moment we will not be with you, ever again," and "From this moment this and that will not be allowed you, ever again." And what they suggested by what I have called "this and that"—what they suggested, my God—may your mercy turn it away from the soul of your servant! What filth they suggested, what disgrace! But now far less than half of me was listening to them—not as if they were openly contradicting me, coming out to meet me head-on, but muttering, as it were, behind my back, and furtively plucking at me as I went, to make me look back. Still, they slowed me down as I hesitated to tear myself away and shake myself free of them and leap across to where I was being called, while violent habit said to me, "Do you think you will be able to live without them?"

8.11.27 But by now it said this very half-heartedly. For in the direction in which I had turned my face, and where I trembled to cross, there was opening up the chaste dignity of Self-Control, serene and cheerful, but not in a loose way, honorably coaxing me to come and not to hesitate, and stretching out devout hands to receive and embrace me, hands full of flocks of good examples. There were so many boys and girls, there were many young people and people of every age, grave widows and aged virgins, and in all of them Self-Control herself, by no means barren, but a fruitful mother of children, of joys, by you, Lord, her husband. And she smiled at me with a smile of encouragement, as if to say: "Can't you do what these men and these women can? Or can these men and women do it by themselves, and not in the Lord their God? The Lord their God gave me to them. Why do you stand on yourself, and so cannot stand? Throw yourself on him! Do not be afraid. "He will not pull away and let you fall. Throw yourself on him without a care! He will catch you and heal you." And I blushed deeply, because I could still hear the murmurs of those trifles, and I hung there hesitating. And again she seemed to say: "Turn a deaf ear to those unclean members of yours, so that they may be put to death. They tell you of delights, but not like the law of the Lord your God." This dispute in my heart was nothing but myself against myself. And Alypius,

fixed at my side, silently awaited the outcome of my unusual agitation.

UNDER THE FIG TREE

Weeping under a fig tree, Augustine hears a child's voice say "take and read," reads Paul, and converts.

8.12.28 But when deep reflection had dragged up from the secret depths and heaped up all my misery in the sight of my heart, a huge storm arose, bringing a huge downpour of tears. And to pour it all out with its own cries, I got up and left Alypius—solitude seemed to me better suited to the business of weeping—and withdrew farther off, so that even his presence could not be a burden to me. That was how I was then, and he sensed it; for I had said something, I think, in which the sound of my voice was already heavy with weeping, and in that state I had got up. So he stayed where we had been sitting, utterly astonished. I flung myself down, I do not know how, under a fig tree, and gave free rein to my tears, and the rivers of my eyes burst out, a sacrifice acceptable to you. And not in these words, but to this effect, I said many things to you: "And you, Lord—how long?[21] "How long, Lord? Will you be angry forever? Do not remember our old iniquities." For I felt that I was held by them. I kept crying out pitiful words: "How long, how long—'tomorrow, and tomorrow'? Why not now? Why not an end to my disgrace this very hour?"[22]

8.12.29 I was saying these things and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart. And suddenly I hear a voice from a divine house, chanting and repeating over and over—whether a boy's or a girl's, I do not know: "Tolle lege, tolle lege"—"Take it and read, take it and read." At once my expression changed, and I began to think very intently whether children used to chant anything like this in some kind of game. I could not recall ever having heard it anywhere. So, holding back the rush of my tears, I got up, interpreting it as nothing other than a divine command

21 Psalm 6:3.
22 Psalm 79:5, 8.

to open the book and read the first passage I should come upon. For I had heard about Antony that he had been admonished by a reading from the gospel which he happened to come in on, as if what was being read was said to him: "Go, sell everything you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me"; and that by such an oracle he was at once converted to you.[23] So I hurried back to the place where Alypius was sitting, for I had put down the book of the apostle there when I got up. I snatched it up, opened it, and read in silence the passage on which my eyes first fell: "Not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual excess and debauchery, not in quarreling and jealousy; but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in its desires." I did not want to read further, nor was there any need. For instantly, as I reached the end of this sentence, it was as if a light of assurance had been poured into my heart, and all the darkness of doubt fled away.[24]

8.12.30 Then, marking the place with my finger or some other sign, I closed the book, and with a calm face now I told Alypius. And he, in turn, told me in this way what was happening within him, which I did not know. He asked to see what I had read. I showed him, and he looked beyond what I had read. I did not know what followed. What followed was this: "Welcome the one who is weak in faith." He applied this to himself and disclosed it to me. And strengthened by such an admonition, without any turbulent hesitation, he joined me in the good decision and purpose, which suited his character very well, for in character he had long been far, far better than I. Then we go in to my mother and tell her: she rejoices.[25] We tell her how it happened: she exults and triumphs, and she blessed you, who are able to do more than we ask or understand; for she saw that you had granted her so much more concerning me than she used to ask with her pitiful, tearful groans. For you converted me to yourself, so that I sought neither a wife nor any hope of this world, standing

23 Matthew 19:21.
24 Romans 13:13–14.
25 Romans 14:1.

on that rule of faith on which you had shown me to her so many years before. And you turned her mourning into joy, far more abundantly than she had wanted, and far dearer and more chaste than the joy she looked for in grandchildren of my flesh.[26]

26 Monica's dream in Book III, in which she saw her son standing beside her on a wooden rule.

Book IX

Baptism and Monica's death
Augustine resigns his post, is baptized, and shares a vision with Monica before her death.

9.1.1 O Lord, I am your servant; I am your servant and the son of your maidservant. You have broken my chains; I will offer you a sacrifice of praise. Let my heart and my tongue praise you, and let all my bones say, "Lord, who is like you?" Let them say it; and answer me, and say to my soul, "I am your salvation." Who am I, and what kind of man am I? What evil has there not been in my deeds—or, if not in my deeds, in my words—or, if not in my words, in my will? But you, Lord, are good and merciful, and your right hand looked into the depth of my death and drained from the bottom of my heart the abyss of corruption. And this was the whole of it: not to will what I willed, and to will what you willed. But where was my free will through all those long years, and from what deep and hidden recess was it called out in a moment, so that I bent my neck to your easy yoke and my shoulders to your light burden, Christ Jesus, my helper and my redeemer? How sweet it suddenly became to me to be without the sweetness of trifles! What I had been afraid to lose, it was now a joy to let go. For you drove them out of me, you, the true and highest sweetness; you drove them out and came in instead of them, sweeter than every pleasure, but not to flesh and blood; brighter than every light, but more inward than any secret; higher than every honor, but not to those who are high in their own eyes. Now my mind was free from the gnawing cares of seeking office and making money, of wallowing and scratching

the itch of lust; and I chattered to you, my glory and my riches and my salvation, the Lord my God.

LEAVING THE CHAIR OF RHETORIC

Augustine quietly resigns his teaching post at the vintage holidays, and friends Verecundus and Nebridius die believers.

9.2.2 And I decided, in your sight, not to snatch the service of my tongue abruptly from the marketplace of talk, but to withdraw it gently, so that boys who were studying not your law, not your peace, but lying follies and the battles of the courts, would no longer buy from my mouth weapons for their madness. And conveniently, only a very few days remained until the vintage holidays, and I decided to put up with them, so as to leave in the ordinary way and, redeemed by you, not come back to put myself up for sale. So our plan was known before you, but not before anyone else except our own people. And we had agreed among ourselves that it should not be spread about to anyone—although, as we climbed up from the valley of weeping and sang the song of ascents, you had given us sharp arrows and devastating coals against the deceitful tongue that opposes under the guise of advice, and devours by loving, as it does with food.[1]

9.2.3 You had pierced our heart with your love, and we carried your words fixed deep within us. And the examples of your servants, whom you had made shining out of black and living out of dead, gathered into the lap of our thought, burned and consumed our heavy sluggishness, so that we would not sink into the depths; and they set us so strongly on fire that every breath of contradiction from a deceitful tongue could only inflame us more fiercely, not put us out. Yet because, for the sake of your name, which you have made holy throughout the earth, our vow and purpose would surely also find people to praise it, it seemed like boasting not to wait for the holidays, now so close, but to

1 The vintage holidays were the autumn break in the school year. "Song of ascents" is the heading of Psalms 120–134; the arrows and coals echo Psalm 120:2–4.

leave a public profession, standing before the eyes of all, ahead of time; so that everyone's faces would turn toward what I had done, observing how I had wanted to get ahead of the vintage holiday so near at hand, and they would say a great deal about me, as though I had sought to seem great. And what good would that have done me—that people should speculate and argue about my state of mind, and that our good should be spoken ill of?

9.2.4 What is more, that very summer my lungs had begun to give way under too much literary labor: I breathed with difficulty, pains in my chest showed they were injured, and they refused to produce a clear or sustained voice. At first this had upset me, because it was forcing me, almost out of necessity, to lay down the burden of that teaching post, or at least, if I could be treated and recover, to take a break from it. But when the full will to be still and see that you are the Lord had arisen in me and become firm—you know it, my God—I even began to be glad that I had this, too, as a truthful excuse, to soften the offense of people who, for the sake of their children, never wanted me to be free. So, full of such joy, I endured that interval of time until it ran out—I do not know whether it was even twenty days—yet they were endured with fortitude, because the craving that used to share the heavy business with me had gone, and I would have been left crushed if patience had not taken its place. One of your servants, my brothers, may say that I sinned in this: that with my heart already fully in your service, I let myself sit even one hour in the chair of lies. I will not argue. But you, most merciful Lord, did you not pardon and forgive me this sin too, along with the other horrible and deadly ones, in the holy water?

9.3.5 Verecundus was wasting away with anxiety over this good of ours, because he saw that, owing to the ties that held him so very tightly, he would be left out of our fellowship. He was not yet a Christian, though his wife was a believer; yet she herself, a fetter tighter than all the rest, held him back from the journey we had set out on, and he said he did not want to be a Christian in any other way than the one that was impossible for him. He

very kindly offered that, for as long as we stayed there, we should stay on his property. You will repay him, Lord, at the recompense of the just, for you have already repaid him with that very lot. For although we were away, being already in Rome, he was seized by a bodily illness, and during it became a Christian and one of the faithful, and departed this life. So you had mercy not only on him but also on us, so that we would not be tormented by unbearable grief, thinking of our friend's outstanding kindness toward us and yet unable to count him in your flock. Thanks be to you, our God! We are yours. Your encouragements and consolations show it: faithful to your promise, you repay Verecundus, in return for that country estate of his at Cassiciacum, where we rested in you from the heat of the world, with the loveliness of your paradise of everlasting virtue; for you forgave him his sins on earth, on the mountain thick as curds, your mountain, the fertile mountain.[2]

9.3.6 So Verecundus was troubled then, but Nebridius shared our joy. For although he too, not yet a Christian, had fallen into that pit of most pernicious error, believing that the flesh of your Son, the Truth, was a phantom, he was emerging from it and was in this state: not yet steeped in any sacraments of your Church, but a most ardent seeker of the truth. Not long after our conversion and our rebirth through your baptism, when he too had become one of the Catholic faithful, serving you in perfect chastity and self-control in Africa among his own people, and his whole household had become Christian through him, you released him from the flesh. And now he lives in Abraham's bosom. Whatever it is that is meant by that bosom, there my Nebridius lives, my sweet friend, and your son, Lord, adopted from a freedman: there he lives. For what other place is there for such a soul? He lives in that place about which he used to ask me, a poor inexperienced little man, so many questions. Now he no longer puts his ear to my mouth, but his spiritual mouth to your fountain, and he drinks in wisdom as much as he can, as

2 Cassiciacum, an estate near Milan. The "mountain thick as curds" is Psalm 68:15 in Augustine's Latin Bible, punning on the estate's name (caseus, "cheese").

much as he longs for, happy without end. And I do not think he is so intoxicated by it as to forget me, since you, Lord, whom he drinks, are mindful of us. So that was how we were: consoling Verecundus, who was sad about this conversion of ours, though our friendship was unharmed, and encouraging him to the faith suited to his station, that is, married life; and waiting for Nebridius to follow us, which, being so near, he could do. And he was on the point of doing it, when at last those days rolled by. For they seemed long and many, because of my love for the freedom of leisure to sing from my very marrow. My heart said to you, "I have sought your face; your face, Lord, I will seek."

CASSICIACUM

At Cassiciacum Augustine writes dialogues, reads the Psalms with joy, and is healed of a toothache.

9.4.7 And the day came when I was released in fact from the profession of rhetoric, from which I had already been released in thought; and it was done. You rescued my tongue from where you had already rescued my heart; and I blessed you, rejoicing, and set out for the country house with all my people. What I did there in my writing—writing now at your service, yet still breathing of the school of pride, as if pausing for breath—is witnessed by the books of dialogues held with those who were present and with myself alone before you; and what I did with Nebridius in his absence is witnessed by my letters. And when would I have enough time to recall all your great kindnesses toward us in that period, especially as I am hurrying on to other, greater things?[3] For my memory calls me back, and it becomes sweet to me, Lord, to confess to you by what inner goads you tamed me; how you leveled me, bringing low the mountains and hills of my thoughts, and made my crooked ways straight and my rough ways smooth; and how you brought Alypius himself, the brother of my heart, under the name of your only Son, our

3 The dialogues written at Cassiciacum include Against the Academics, On the Happy Life and On Order; the conversation with himself is the Soliloquies.

Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—a name which at first he disdained to have put into our writings. For he wanted them to smell of the cedars of the schools, which the Lord has already broken, rather than of the healing herbs of the Church, which are good against snakes.

9.4.8 What cries I raised to you, my God, when I read the Psalms of David, songs of faith, sounds of devotion that shut out a swollen spirit—I, a novice in true love of you, a catechumen on holiday at a country house with Alypius, also a catechumen, and my mother staying close by us: a woman in dress, a man in faith, an old woman in serenity, a mother in love, a Christian in devotion! What cries I raised to you in those psalms, and how they set me on fire toward you, and how I burned to recite them, if I could, to the whole world, against the arrogance of the human race! And yet they are sung throughout the world, and there is no one who can hide from your heat. With what violent and bitter pain I was indignant with the Manichees, and yet pitied them in turn, because they did not know those sacraments, those medicines, and were madly raging against the very antidote that could have made them sane! I wish they had been somewhere near at that time, and, without my knowing they were there, had watched my face and heard my voice when I read the fourth Psalm in that time of leisure. What that psalm did to me—"When I called on you, you heard me, God of my righteousness; in trouble you gave me room. Have mercy on me, Lord, and hear my prayer"—I wish they could have heard, without my knowing whether they heard, so that they would not think I was saying for their benefit the things I said among these words. For in truth I would not have said those things, nor said them in that way, if I had sensed that they were hearing and seeing me; and even if I had said them, they would not have taken them as I spoke them, with myself and to myself, before you, out of the intimate feeling of my mind.[4]

9.4.9 I shuddered with fear, and at the same moment I burned with hope and with rejoicing in your mercy, Father. And all this

4 Psalm 4:1.

poured out through my eyes and my voice when your good Spirit turned toward us and said to us: "Children of men, how long will you be heavy of heart? Why do you love emptiness and seek after lies?" For I had loved emptiness and sought after lies. And you, Lord, had already glorified your Holy One, raising him from the dead and setting him at your right hand, from where he would send from on high his promise, the Paraclete, the Spirit of truth. And he had already sent him, but I did not know it. He had sent him because he had now been glorified, rising from the dead and ascending into heaven. Before that, "the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet been glorified." And the prophecy cries out: "How long will you be heavy of heart? Why do you love emptiness and seek after lies?[5] "And know that the Lord has glorified his Holy One." It cries "How long"; it cries "Know"; and I, for so long not knowing, had loved emptiness and sought after lies. And so I heard and trembled, because these words are spoken to people such as I remembered I had been. For in the phantoms I had held for truth there was emptiness and lies. And I cried out many things, heavily and forcefully, in the pain of my remembering. If only those who even now still love emptiness and seek after lies had heard them! Perhaps they would have been shaken and would have vomited it up; and you would hear them when they cried out to you, because he who intercedes with you for us died for us by a true death of the flesh.[6]

9.4.10 I read: "Be angry, and do not sin." And how I was moved, my God—I who had already learned to be angry with myself over the past, so as not to sin in future; and rightly angry, because it was not some other nature, a race of darkness, that was sinning in me, as those say who are not angry with themselves, and "store up wrath for themselves on the day of wrath and of the revelation of your just judgment." My good things

5 Psalm 4:2; John 7:39. The Paraclete ("Advocate") is the Holy Spirit promised by Jesus in John 14–16.

6 Psalm 4:3. The "phantoms" are the imaginary cosmic images of Manichaean doctrine.

were no longer outside, nor were they sought with eyes of flesh under this sun. For those who want to find their joy outside themselves easily grow empty and spill themselves out on things that are seen and temporal, and with starving thoughts they lick at their images.[7] Oh, if only they would grow weary with hunger and say, "Who will show us good things?" And let us say, and let them hear: "The light of your face, Lord, is sealed upon us." For we are not the light that enlightens every human being; we are enlightened by you, so that we who were once darkness may be light in you. Oh, if only they could see the eternal within! Because I had tasted it, I gnashed my teeth that I could not show it to them, if they brought me their heart in their eyes, turned outward, away from you, and said, "Who will show us good things?" For there, where I had been angry with myself, within, in my chamber where I had been pierced with remorse, where I had offered sacrifice, slaying my old self, and, beginning to ponder my renewal, had hoped in you—there you had begun to grow sweet to me, and had "put gladness in my heart."[8] And I cried out as I read these things outwardly and recognized them inwardly. I did not want to be multiplied by earthly goods, devouring time and devoured by time, when I had, in eternal simplicity, another grain and wine and oil.[9]

9.4.11 And at the next verse I cried out with the deep cry of my heart: "Oh, in peace! Oh, in the Selfsame!" Oh, what did it say? "I will lie down and take my sleep!" For who will stand against us when the saying that is written comes to pass: "Death is swallowed up in victory"? And you are supremely the Selfsame, you who do not change, and in you is the rest that forgets all toils; for there is no other with you, nor are there other things to be gained which are not what you are; but you, Lord, have set me singly in hope. I read and I burned, and I could not find what to do for those deaf dead, of whom I had been one—a plague, a bit-

7 Psalm 4:4; Romans 2:5.
8 Psalm 4:6–7.
9 Echoing Psalm 4:7, where the wicked are "multiplied" by their grain, wine and oil.

ter, blind barker against writings honeyed with the honey of heaven and luminous with your light; and I wasted away with grief over the enemies of this Scripture.[10]

9.4.12 When shall I recall everything from those days of holiday? But I have not forgotten, nor will I keep silent about, the harshness of your scourge and the wonderful swiftness of your mercy. You were tormenting me then with toothache, and when it grew so bad that I could not speak, it came into my heart to urge all my friends who were present to pray for me to you, the God of salvation in every sense. I wrote this on a wax tablet and gave it to be read to them. As soon as we had knelt with simple devotion, that pain fled. But what pain? And how did it flee? I was terrified, I confess, my Lord, my God. For I had experienced nothing like it since my earliest years. And your promptings were driven deep into me; and rejoicing in faith, I praised your name. And that faith would not let me be at ease about my past sins, which had not yet been forgiven me through your baptism.

9.5.13 When the vintage holidays were over, I gave notice that the people of Milan should provide another word-seller for their students, both because I had chosen to serve you and because, with my difficulty in breathing and the pain in my chest, I was no longer equal to that profession. And by letter I made known to your bishop, the holy man Ambrose, my former errors and my present intention, asking him to advise me what I should read above all from your books, to become readier and fitter to receive so great a grace. He told me to read the prophet Isaiah—because, I believe, he foretells the gospel and the calling of the Gentiles more plainly than the others. But I did not understand the first passage I read, and, supposing the whole book to be like that, I put it aside, to return to it when I was better practiced in the Lord's language.

10 Psalm 4:8–9 (in the Latin, "in peace, in the selfsame"); 1 Corinthians 15:54. "The Selfsame" (idipsum) is Augustine's name for God as unchanging Being.

BAPTISM

Augustine is baptized in Milan with Alypius and his gifted son Adeodatus.

9.6.14 Then, when the time came for me to give in my name, we left the country and went back to Milan. Alypius too resolved to be reborn in you along with me. He had already put on the humility fitting for your sacraments, and was so strong a master of his body that he trod the icy soil of Italy barefoot, with unusual daring. We also took with us the boy Adeodatus, born of me in the flesh from my sin. You had made him well. He was about fifteen years old, and in intelligence he surpassed many serious and learned men. I confess your gifts to you, Lord my God, creator of all things, well able to give form to our deformities; for in that boy I had nothing of mine except the sin. That he was being brought up by us in your discipline—you inspired us to that, no one else. I confess your gifts to you. There is a book of mine entitled *On the Teacher*: he converses with me there.[11] You know that all the thoughts put there in the mouth of the one talking with me were his, when he was sixteen. I found many other things in him more wonderful still: that intelligence filled me with awe. And who but you is the maker of such wonders? Soon you took his life from the earth, and I remember him with less anxiety, fearing nothing for his boyhood or his youth, or for that person at all. We joined him to ourselves as one of our own age in your grace, to be brought up in your discipline. And we were baptized, and anxiety about our past life fled from us. In those days I could not have enough of the wonderful sweetness of contemplating the depth of your plan for the salvation of the human race. How I wept at your hymns and songs, deeply moved by the voices of your sweetly singing Church![12] Those

11 Candidates for baptism enrolled at the start of Lent; Augustine was baptized by Ambrose at Easter AD 387. Adeodatus ("given by God") was his son by his long-time partner.

12 Adeodatus died about AD 390, still in his teens.

voices flowed into my ears, and truth was distilled into my heart; from it a feeling of devotion welled up, and the tears ran, and it was good for me to be with them.

HYMNS IN MILAN

Augustine recalls how Ambrose introduced hymn singing during Justina's persecution and the martyrs' relics were found.

9.7.15 Not long before, the church of Milan had begun to practice this kind of consolation and encouragement, the brothers singing together with great fervor, in voice and heart. It was only a year, or not much more, since Justina, mother of the boy emperor Valentinian, had been persecuting your man Ambrose for the sake of her heresy, into which she had been led by the Arians. The devout people kept watch in the church, ready to die with their bishop, your servant. There my mother, your handmaid, taking the lead in anxiety and vigils, lived on prayers. We, still cold, untouched by the heat of your Spirit, were nonetheless stirred by the alarm and turmoil of the city. It was then that the singing of hymns and psalms after the custom of the Eastern regions was instituted, so that the people should not waste away in the weariness of grief; and from then until today it has been kept, with many, indeed nearly all, of your flocks throughout the rest of the world following it.[13]

9.7.16 Then, in a vision, you revealed to your bishop whom I have mentioned the place where the bodies of the martyrs Protasius and Gervasius lay hidden. For so many years you had kept them incorrupt in the treasury of your secret counsel, so that at the right moment you might bring them out to check a woman's fury—but a royal woman's. For when they had been uncovered and dug up and were being carried with fitting honor to Ambrose's basilica, not only were those tormented by unclean spirits healed, the demons themselves confessing it, but also a certain citizen, blind for many years and very well known

13 Justina, mother of Valentinian II, tried in AD 385–386 to claim a Milan basilica for the Arians, who denied that the Son is equal to the Father.

to the city, asked the cause of the people's tumultuous joy, and when he heard it, leapt up and begged his guide to lead him there. Brought there, he was allowed to touch with his handkerchief the bier of your saints, whose death is precious in your sight. When he had done so and put it to his eyes, at once they were opened.[14] From this the news spread; from this your praises rang out, fervent and shining; from this the mind of that hostile woman, though not brought to the health of believing, was at least restrained from the fury of persecuting. Thanks be to you, my God! From where, and to where, have you led my remembrance, that I should confess these things also to you—great things that I had forgotten and passed over? And yet even then, when the fragrance of your ointments was so strong, we did not run after you. That is why I wept all the more among the songs of your hymns: I who had long sighed for you, and at last breathed you in, as far as air is let into a house of grass.[15]

MONICA'S GIRLHOOD

Monica dies at Ostia, and Augustine recounts her strict upbringing and her cure of a secret drinking habit.

9.8.17 You who make those of one mind dwell in one house joined to us also Evodius, a young man from our own town. While serving as an imperial agent, he had been converted to you and baptized before us, and, leaving the service of the world, had girded himself for yours. We were together, meaning to live together in holy resolve. We were looking for the place where we could most usefully serve you, and together we were going back to Africa. And when we were at Ostia on the Tiber, my mother died. I pass over much, because I am in great haste. Accept my confessions and thanksgivings, my God, for countless things, even in silence. But I will not pass over whatever my soul brings to birth about that servant of yours, who brought me to birth

14 The relics of these two Milanese martyrs were discovered in June AD 386.
15 Echoing Song of Songs 1:3–4. The "house of grass" is the body (compare Isaiah 40:6, "all flesh is grass").

both in the flesh, that I might be born into this temporal light, and in her heart, that I might be born into eternal light. I will speak not of her gifts, but of your gifts in her; for she had not made herself, nor brought herself up.[16] You created her—neither her father nor her mother knew what sort of person would come from them—and she was trained in fear of you by the rod of your Christ, the rule of your only Son, in a faithful household, a sound member of your Church. Yet she used to praise not so much her mother's care over her upbringing as that of a certain aged servant, who had carried her father as a baby, the way little ones are usually carried on the backs of older girls. For this reason, and because of her age and excellent character, she was much honored by her master and mistress in that Christian household. So she was entrusted with the care of the daughters of the house, and carried it out diligently: in restraining them when necessary she was forceful, with a holy strictness, and in teaching them sober and prudent. For apart from the hours when they were fed, very moderately, at their parents' table, she would not let them drink even water, however much they burned with thirst, guarding against a bad habit and adding a sound word: "Now you drink water because you have no wine at your disposal; but when you come to husbands and become mistresses of storerooms and cellars, water will seem cheap, but the habit of drinking will prevail." By this method of instruction and this authority in command she curbed the greed of that tender age, and shaped the girls' very thirst to a decent measure, so that they no longer even wanted what was not fitting.

9.8.18 And yet, as your servant told me, her son, a love of wine had crept up on her—crept up on her. For when, as the custom was, her parents told her, as a sober girl, to draw wine from the cask, she would dip the cup in through the opening at the top, and before pouring the neat wine into the flask she would sip a little with the tips of her lips—no more, because her taste refused it. She did this not from any craving for drink, but from

16 Evodius later became bishop of Uzalis in Africa. Ostia was Rome's port at the mouth of the Tiber.

the overflowing high spirits of youth, which bubble up in playful impulses and are usually held down in the years of childhood by the weight of their elders. So, adding to that little a little more each day—for "whoever despises small things falls little by little"—she had slipped into such a habit that she was eagerly gulping down little cups nearly full of wine. Where then was that shrewd old woman, and her forceful prohibition? Could anything prevail against a hidden disease, unless your medicine, Lord, kept watch over us?[17] Father and mother and nurses were absent, but you were present, who created, who call, who work something good even through those set over us, for the salvation of souls. What did you do then, my God? How did you treat her? How did you heal her? Did you not bring out of another soul a hard and sharp insult, like a surgeon's knife from your hidden stores, and with one stroke cut away that rot? For the maid with whom she used to go to the cask, quarrelling with her young mistress, as happens, when the two were alone, threw this fault in her face with the bitterest taunt, calling her a "little wine-swiller." Pierced by that goad, she looked at her own foulness, and at once condemned it and cast it off. Just as flattering friends corrupt, so quarrelling enemies often correct. Yet you repay them not for what you do through them, but for what they themselves intended. For the maid in her anger wanted to provoke her young mistress, not to cure her; and so she did it in secret, either because the time and place of the quarrel had found them that way, or so that she herself might not be endangered for having told so late. But you, Lord, ruler of things in heaven and on earth, who turn to your own uses the depths of the torrent, the ordered turbulence of the flow of the ages, made one soul sane even through the insanity of another—so that no one, noticing this, should credit it to his own power if someone he wants corrected is corrected by his word.

17 Sirach 19:1.

MONICA AS WIFE AND MOTHER

Augustine describes Monica's patience with a hot-tempered husband and her gift as a peacemaker.

9.9.19 So she was brought up modestly and soberly, made subject by you to her parents rather than by her parents to you. When she reached full marriageable age, she was given to a husband, and served him as her lord, and strove to win him for you, speaking of you to him through her character, by which you made her beautiful, and respectfully lovable and admirable to her husband. She bore his wrongs to their marriage bed in such a way that she never had any quarrel with her husband over it. For she waited for your mercy upon him, that believing in you he might become chaste. Besides this, he was as remarkable for kindness as he was hot in anger. But she knew not to resist an angry husband, not only in deed but not even in word. Once she saw that he had cooled and calmed down, and the moment was right, she would give an account of what she had done, if he had perhaps been roused without due thought. Indeed, many married women whose husbands were gentler bore the marks of blows, even on their disfigured faces. In friendly conversation they would blame their husbands' behavior; she would blame their tongues, warning them seriously, as if in jest, that from the moment they heard the so-called marriage contract read aloud, they ought to have regarded it as the document by which they had been made servants; and so, mindful of their condition, they ought not to be proud toward their masters. And they were amazed, knowing what a fierce husband she had to put up with, that it had never been heard of, nor shown by any sign, that Patricius had beaten his wife, or that they had been at odds with each other in a domestic quarrel even for a single day. When they asked her the reason as friends, she would teach them her rule, which I mentioned above. Those who kept it found it worked and thanked her; those who did not remained under the yoke and were mistreated.

9.9.20 Her mother-in-law too, who at first was set against her by the whispers of malicious maids, she so won over by her attentions, persevering in patience and gentleness, that the older woman of her own accord reported to her son the meddling tongues of the maids, by which domestic peace between herself and her daughter-in-law was being disturbed, and asked for them to be punished. So after he, obeying his mother, and concerned for the discipline of the household and the harmony of his family, had punished with the whip those who had been reported, at the discretion of the one who reported them, she promised that anyone who spoke ill of her daughter-in-law to her, thinking to please her, must expect the same reward from her. After that no one dared, and they lived together in a memorable sweetness of goodwill.

9.9.21 This too was a great gift you had given to that good servant of yours, in whose womb you created me, my God, my mercy: wherever she could, she showed herself such a peacemaker between any souls at odds and in conflict that, although she heard many very bitter things from each about the other—the kind of thing swollen, undigested discord tends to belch out, when the indigestion of hatreds is breathed out in sour talk to a friend who is present about an enemy who is absent—she would nevertheless report nothing of either to the other except what might help to reconcile them. I might think this a small good, if I did not know to my sorrow countless crowds of people (through some dreadful pestilence of sins spreading far and wide) who not only report to angry enemies what their angry enemies have said, but even add what was not said; whereas, on the contrary, for a human being worthy of the name it ought to be too little merely not to stir up or increase people's enmities by speaking ill, unless he also strives to extinguish them by speaking well. Such was she, with you as her teacher, the innermost Teacher, in the school of her heart.

9.9.22 Finally, near the very end of his life in time, she won her husband too for you; and once he was a believer she did not lament in him what she had endured when he was not yet one.

She was also the servant of your servants. Whoever of them knew her praised and honored and loved you greatly in her, because they sensed your presence in her heart, the fruits of her holy way of life bearing witness. For she had been "the wife of one husband," had repaid her parents in kind, had managed her household devoutly, and was "well attested for good works." She had brought up her children, laboring to give birth to them again each time she saw them straying from you. Lastly, Lord, to all of us—for by your gift you allow us, your servants, to speak—who before she fell asleep were already living together in you, having received the grace of your baptism, she gave such care as if she had borne us all, and served us as if she had been born of us all.[18]

THE VISION AT OSTIA

At a window in Ostia, Augustine and Monica together rise in thought toward eternal Wisdom.

9.10.23 As the day approached on which she was to depart this life—a day you knew, though we did not—it came about, as I believe, through your arranging in your hidden ways, that she and I were standing alone, leaning at a window that looked out on the garden inside the house where we were staying, there at Ostia on the Tiber, where, away from the crowds, after the toil of a long journey, we were recovering our strength for the voyage. So we were talking alone together, very sweetly, and, "forgetting what lies behind and straining toward what lies ahead," we were asking each other, in the presence of the Truth, which you are, what the eternal life of the saints would be like, which "no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the human heart." But with the mouth of our heart we gaped for the streams from above of your fountain, the fountain of life, which is with you, so that, sprinkled from it as far as we could take it in, we might somehow contemplate so great a thing.[19]

18 1 Timothy 5:4, 9–10.
19 Philippians 3:13; 1 Corinthians 2:9; compare Psalm 36:9.

9.10.24 And when our conversation had reached this point—that the pleasure of the bodily senses, however great, in however great a bodily light, seemed, beside the delight of that life, not worth comparing, nor even mentioning—raising ourselves with a more burning love toward the Selfsame, we passed step by step through all bodily things, and through heaven itself, from which the sun and moon and stars shine upon the earth. And still we climbed, inwardly, thinking and speaking and marveling at your works. And we came to our own minds, and we went beyond them, to reach the region of unfailing abundance, from which you feed Israel forever on the food of truth. And there life is Wisdom, through whom all these things come to be, both those that have been and those that will be; and Wisdom itself does not come to be, but is as it was, and so will be always. Or rather, having been and going to be are not in it, but only being, since it is eternal: for having been and going to be are not eternal. And while we were speaking of it and gaping for it, we touched it slightly, with one whole beat of the heart. And we sighed, and left there, bound fast, "the firstfruits of the Spirit," and returned to the noise of our mouths, where a word both begins and ends. And what is like your Word, our Lord, who remains in himself without growing old, and makes all things new?[20]

9.10.25 So we were saying: If for anyone the tumult of the flesh fell silent; if the images of earth and water and air fell silent; if the heavens too fell silent, and the soul itself fell silent to itself and passed beyond itself by not thinking of itself; if dreams fell silent, and imagined revelations, every tongue and every sign, and whatever comes to be by passing away—if for anyone all this fell wholly silent (for if anyone hears them, all these things say, "We did not make ourselves; he made us who abides forever"); if, having said this, they now fell quiet, since they have lifted up the ear to him who made them, and he alone should speak, not through them but through himself, so that we might hear his word, not through a tongue of flesh, nor through

20 Romans 8:23.

the voice of an angel, nor through the sound of thunder, nor through the riddle of a likeness, but might hear him himself, whom we love in these things, him himself without these things (just as now we reached out and in swift thought touched the eternal Wisdom that abides above all things); if this were to continue, and other visions of a far lower kind were withdrawn, and this one alone were to seize and absorb and hide away its beholder in inward joys, so that eternal life should be like that moment of understanding for which we sighed—would not this be:[21] "Enter into the joy of your Lord"? And when will that be? When we all rise again, but are not all changed?[22]

9.10.26 I was saying such things, even if not in this way or in these words; yet, Lord, you know that on that day, as we were talking of such things, and this world with all its delights grew worthless to us as we spoke, she said: "Son, for my part, I no longer find delight in anything in this life. What I am still doing here, and why I am here, I do not know, now that my hope in this world is spent. There was one thing for which I wanted to linger a little in this life: to see you a Catholic Christian before I died. My God has granted me this more abundantly, so that I see you even despising earthly happiness and become his servant. What am I doing here?"

MONICA'S DEATH

Monica falls ill, tells her sons not to worry about her burial place, and dies aged fifty-six.

9.11.27 What I replied to her I do not clearly remember; meanwhile, within five days or not much more, she took to her bed with fever. And while she was ill, one day she fainted and was for a little while withdrawn from what was around her. We ran to her, but she quickly came back to her senses, looked at us standing there, my brother and me, and said to us, like someone asking a question, "Where was I?" Then, seeing us stunned with

21 Compare Psalm 100:3.
22 1 Corinthians 15:51, in the Latin version Augustine used.

grief, she said, "You will bury your mother here." I kept silent and held back my tears; but my brother said something to the effect that he wished for her, as a happier thing, to die not abroad but in her own country. On hearing this, with an anxious face, she rebuked him with her eyes for thinking such things, and then, looking at me, said, "See what he is saying." And soon she said to both of us: "Lay this body anywhere. Do not let concern for it trouble you at all.[23] "Only this I ask of you: that you remember me at the altar of the Lord, wherever you may be." And when she had expressed this wish in such words as she could, she fell silent, and as her illness grew worse she suffered.

9.11.28 But I, thinking of your gifts, invisible God, which you send into the hearts of your faithful, and from which wonderful harvests spring, rejoiced and gave thanks to you, recalling what I knew: how anxious she had always been about the tomb she had provided and prepared for herself beside her husband's body. Because they had lived in great harmony, she also wanted —so little is the human mind able to grasp divine things—this to be added to that happiness and remembered among people: that it had been granted to her, after her journey across the sea, that the united dust of husband and wife should be covered by one earth. But when this emptiness had begun, through the fullness of your goodness, to leave her heart, I did not know; and I rejoiced, marveling that she had shown herself so to me (although in that conversation of ours at the window, when she said, "What am I doing here now?", she did not appear to desire to die in her own country). I also heard afterward that, when we were already at Ostia, she had been talking one day, with a mother's confidence, to some friends of mine, when I was not present, about contempt for this life and the good of death; and when they were astonished at such strength in a woman (for you had given it to her), and asked whether she did not dread leaving her body so far from her own city, she said, "Nothing is far from God, and there is no fear that at the end of the world he will not know where to raise me up from." So on the ninth day of her ill-

23 Augustine's brother was Navigius.

ness, in the fifty-sixth year of her life and the thirty-third of mine, that devout and holy soul was released from the body.[24]

GRIEF

Augustine holds back his tears through the funeral, then finally weeps for his mother alone.

9.12.29 I closed her eyes, and an immense sadness flooded into my heart and was overflowing into tears; and at the same moment my eyes, under the violent command of my mind, drank their spring back until it was dry; and in such a struggle it went very badly with me. Then, when she breathed her last, the boy Adeodatus cried out in lamentation, and, checked by all of us, fell silent. In the same way something childish in me too, which was slipping into tears, was checked by the grown-up voice of my heart and fell silent. For we did not think it fitting to mark that funeral with tearful laments and groans, because these usually bewail some misery of the dying, or their complete extinction, as it were. But she was neither dying miserably nor dying altogether. We held this for certain from the evidence of her character, and from her "unfeigned faith," and on sure grounds.[25]

9.12.30 What was it, then, that grieved me so deeply within, if not the fresh wound from the sudden rupture of our habit of living together, so very sweet and dear? I was glad, indeed, of her testimony: in that very last illness, responding tenderly to my attentions, she called me a dutiful son, and recalled with great affection and love that she had never heard from my mouth a harsh or insulting word hurled at her. But still, my God, who made us, what likeness, what comparison, was there between the honor I paid her and her service to me? And so, because I was losing such great comfort in her, my soul was wounded, and my life was torn apart, as it were, since it had been made one life from hers and mine.

24 Monica died at Ostia in the autumn of AD 387.
25 1 Timothy 1:5.

9.12.31 So when the boy had been checked from weeping, Evodius took up the psalter and began to sing a psalm, to which the whole household responded: "I will sing of mercy and judgment to you, Lord." When people heard what was happening, many brothers and devout women gathered; and while those whose task it was were seeing to the funeral in the customary way, I, in a part of the house where I decently could, with those who thought I should not be left alone, discussed what suited the occasion; and with this balm of truth I soothed a torment known to you, though they did not know it, listening attentively and thinking I was without any feeling of grief. But in your ears, where none of them could hear, I rebuked the softness of my feeling and held back the flood of my sorrow; and it gave way to me a little. Then it was carried along again by its own force—not as far as bursting into tears, nor as far as a change of expression—but I knew what I was crushing down in my heart.[26] And because it displeased me intensely that these human things had so much power over me—things which must happen in the due order and the lot of our condition—I grieved at my grief with another grief, and was worn down by a double sadness.

9.12.32 And see, the body was carried out; we go, we come back, without tears. For not even in those prayers which we poured out to you when the sacrifice of our redemption was offered for her, with the body already placed beside the grave before it was lowered, as is the custom there—not even in those prayers did I weep. But all day long I was deeply sad in secret, and with troubled mind I asked you, as best I could, to heal my pain; and you did not—impressing on my memory, I believe, even by this one lesson, how strong the bond of all habit is, even against a mind that no longer feeds on a deceptive word. It also seemed good to me to go and bathe, because I had heard that baths (*balnea*) got their name from the Greeks' calling them *balanion* ["bath"], because it drives anxiety from the mind.[27]

26 Psalm 101:1.

> See, this too I confess to your mercy, father of orphans: I bathed, and I was just as I had been before I bathed; for the bitterness of grief had not sweated out of my heart. Then I slept, and woke, and found my pain eased in no small part; and as I lay alone in my bed, I remembered the true verses of your Ambrose. For you are,
>
> God, creator of all things,
> ruler of the heavens, who clothe
> the day with lovely light,
> the night with grace of sleep,
> so that rest may restore loosened limbs
> to the use of labor,
> and lift up weary minds,
> and release the anxious from grief.

9.12.33 And from there, little by little, I brought back my former thoughts of your handmaid, of her devout conduct toward you and her holy tenderness and compliance toward us, of which I had suddenly been deprived; and I wanted to weep in your sight about her and for her, about myself and for myself. And I let go the tears I had been holding back, to flow as much as they would, spreading them as a bed beneath my heart. And it rested on them, because your ears were there, not those of some person who would put a proud interpretation on my weeping. And now, Lord, I confess to you in writing. Let whoever wants to read it, and interpret it as he wants; and if he finds it a sin that I wept for my mother for a small part of an hour—my mother, dead for a while to my eyes, who had wept for me many years that I might live in your eyes—let him not mock, but rather, if he is a person of great love, let him himself weep for my sins to you, the Father of all the brothers of your Christ.

27 A popular etymology, taking the Greek word as "throwing out grief."

A PRAYER FOR MONICA

Augustine prays for Monica's sins to be forgiven and asks readers to remember his parents.

9.13.34 But I, my heart now healed of that wound, for which I afterwards rebuked my fleshly feelings, pour out to you, our God, for that servant of yours a very different kind of tears, flowing from a spirit shaken by considering the dangers of every soul that dies in Adam. Although she, made alive in Christ, even before she was released from the flesh, so lived that your name is praised in her faith and conduct, yet I do not dare to say that from the time you regenerated her through baptism no word came out of her mouth against your commandment. And it was said by the Truth, your Son: "Whoever says to his brother, 'You fool,' will be liable to the fire of hell." And woe even to the praiseworthy life of human beings, if it is examined with mercy set aside! But because you do not search out faults relentlessly, we hope with confidence for some place with you.[28] But whoever lists before you his true merits, what does he list before you except your own gifts? Oh, if only human beings would know themselves to be human, and "whoever boasts, let him boast in the Lord"![29]

9.13.35 So I, my praise and my life, God of my heart, setting aside for a while her good deeds, for which I give you thanks with joy, now pray to you for my mother's sins. Hear me through the medicine of our wounds, who hung on the tree and, sitting at your right hand, intercedes with you for us. I know that she acted mercifully and from her heart forgave their debts to her debtors. You too forgive her her debts, if she contracted any in so many years after the water of salvation. Forgive, Lord, forgive, I beg you; do not enter into judgment with her. Let mercy triumph over judgment, because your words are true and you have promised mercy to the merciful. That they might be so,

28 Matthew 5:22.
29 1 Corinthians 1:31.

you gave it to them—you who will have mercy on whom you have mercy, and will show mercy to whom you have been merciful.[30]

9.13.36 And I believe you have already done what I ask; but "accept, Lord, the freely offered words of my mouth." For when the day of her release was close at hand, she gave no thought to having her body lavishly wrapped or embalmed with spices; she did not long for a chosen monument or care about a grave in her homeland. These were not the things she charged us with. She desired only to be remembered at your altar, which she had served without missing a single day, for she knew that from it is dispensed the holy victim by whom the record that stood against us was cancelled, by whom the enemy was defeated—the one who tallies up our offenses and looks for something to charge us with, and found nothing in him in whom we conquer. Who will pour back into him that innocent blood? Who will repay him the price with which he bought us, so as to take us away from him? To the sacrament of this price of ours your handmaid bound her soul with the chain of faith.[31] Let no one tear her away from your protection. Let neither the lion nor the dragon thrust himself between, by force or by cunning. For she will not answer that she owes nothing, for fear of being convicted and seized by the crafty accuser; she will answer that her debts have been forgiven by him to whom no one can repay what he, who owed nothing, repaid for us.

9.13.37 So let her rest in peace with her husband. She was married to no one before him and to no one after him; she served him, bearing fruit for you with patience, so as to win him for you as well. And inspire, my Lord, my God, inspire your servants, my brothers, your sons, my masters, whom I serve with heart and voice and pen, so that as many as read these words may remember at your altar Monica, your servant, together with Patricius, once her husband, through whose flesh you

30 Echoing Psalm 143:2, James 2:13, Matthew 5:7 and Romans 9:15.
31 Psalm 119:108.

brought me into this life—how, I do not know.[32] May they remember with devout affection my parents in this passing light, and my brothers under you, our Father, in our Catholic mother, and my fellow citizens in the eternal Jerusalem, for which your people sighs throughout its pilgrimage, from its setting out to its return. So may what she asked of me at the last be granted her more abundantly through the prayers of many, by means of these confessions, than through my prayers alone.

32 Monica (c. AD 331–387) and Patricius (d. c. 371), Augustine's parents; this is the only place in the Confessions where he names his mother.

Book X

Memory
Augustine explores memory as the place where he seeks God, and examines his present temptations.

WHY CONFESS WHO I AM NOW

Augustine explains why he now confesses not his past but what he is at present.

10.1.1 Let me know you, you who know me; let me know you "even as I am known." Strength of my soul, enter into it and fit it to yourself, so that you may have and hold it "without spot or wrinkle." This is my hope; that is why I speak, and in this hope I rejoice, whenever my joy is sound. As for the other things of this life, the more we weep over them, the less they deserve our tears; and the less we weep over them, the more they deserve them. For see, "you have loved the truth," since "whoever does the truth comes to the light." I want to do it in my heart, before you, in confession, and in my writing, before many witnesses.[1]

10.2.2 And indeed, Lord, to your eyes the abyss of human conscience lies bare: what in me could be hidden from you, even if I were unwilling to confess to you? I would be hiding you from myself, not myself from you. But now that my groaning bears witness that I am displeasing to myself, you shine out, and please, and are loved and longed for, so that I blush for myself and cast myself away and choose you, and may please neither you nor myself except through you. To you, then, Lord, I lie open, whatever I am. And with what fruit I confess to you, I have

1 Ephesians 5:27; Psalm 51:6; John 3:21.

said. Nor do I do it with words and sounds of the flesh, but with words of the soul and the cry of thought, which your ear knows. For when I am bad, confessing to you is nothing other than being displeased with myself; when I am devout, confessing to you is nothing other than not crediting this to myself. For you, Lord, bless the righteous, but first you make the ungodly righteous. So my confession, my God, is made to you in your sight both silently and not silently: silent in sound, it cries out in feeling. For I say nothing right to human beings that you have not first heard from me; nor do you hear anything of that kind from me that you have not first said to me.[2]

10.3.3 What, then, have I to do with human beings, that they should hear my confessions—as if they were going to heal all my diseases? A race curious to learn about other people's lives, lazy about correcting their own! Why do they ask to hear from me what I am, when they do not want to hear from you what they are? And when they hear from me about myself, how do they know whether I am telling the truth, since "no one knows what goes on in a human being except the human spirit that is within him"? But if they hear from you about themselves, they will not be able to say, "The Lord is lying." For what is hearing from you about oneself but knowing oneself? And who, moreover, knows and says, "It is false," unless he himself is lying?[3] But because "love believes all things"—at least among those whom it binds together and makes one—I too, Lord, confess to you in such a way that human beings may hear, though I cannot prove to them that what I confess is true. Yet those whose ears love opens to me believe me.[4]

10.3.4 Yet you, my inmost physician, make clear to me with what fruit I do this. For the confessions of my past wrongs—which you have forgiven and covered, to make me happy in you, changing my soul by faith and by your sacrament—when they are read and heard, stir up the heart so that it does not fall

2 Psalm 5:12; Romans 4:5.
3 Psalm 103:3; 1 Corinthians 2:11.
4 1 Corinthians 13:7.

asleep in despair and say, "I cannot," but wakes up in the love of your mercy and the sweetness of your grace, through which every weak person is made strong who through it becomes aware of his own weakness. And good people are delighted to hear of the past wrongs of those who are now free of them—delighted not because they are wrongs, but because they were and are no more. With what fruit, then, my Lord—to whom my conscience confesses every day, more secure in the hope of your mercy than in its own innocence—with what fruit, I ask, do I also confess to human beings in your presence, through this writing, what I am now, not what I was? That other fruit I have seen and recorded. But what I am now, at this very time of my confessions, many wish to know, both those who know me and those who do not, who have heard something from me or about me; but their ear is not at my heart, where I am whatever I am. So they want to hear me confess what I am within, where they can direct neither eye nor ear nor mind. They want it as people ready to believe—but will they know? For love, which makes them good, tells them that I am not lying when I confess about myself; and it is love in them that believes me.

10.4.5 But with what fruit do they want this? Do they wish to rejoice with me when they hear how near I come to you by your gift, and to pray for me when they hear how far I am held back by my own weight? To such people I will reveal myself. For it is no small fruit, Lord my God, that many should give you thanks for us and many should pray to you for us. Let a brotherly mind love in me what you teach is to be loved, and grieve in me over what you teach is to be grieved over. Let it be a brotherly mind that does this, not a stranger's—not that of the "strangers' children, whose mouth has spoken emptiness, and whose right hand is a right hand of wrongdoing"—but that brotherly mind which, when it approves of me, rejoices over me, and when it disapproves of me, is saddened for me, because whether it approves or disapproves, it loves me. To such people I will reveal myself. Let them breathe freely at my good, and sigh over

my bad.[5] My good is your ordinance and your gift; my bad is my offense and your judgment. Let them breathe freely at the one and sigh over the other, and let hymns and weeping rise into your sight from brotherly hearts, your censers. And you, Lord, delighted by the fragrance of your holy temple, "have mercy on me according to your great mercy," for your name's sake; and never abandoning what you have begun, complete what is incomplete in me.[6]

10.4.6 This is the fruit of my confessions—not what I was but what I am: to confess this not only before you, in a secret exultation that trembles and a secret grief that hopes, but also in the ears of the believing sons of men, companions in my joy and sharers in my mortality, my fellow citizens and fellow pilgrims, those who go before me, those who follow, and those who walk beside me on the way. These are your servants, my brothers, whom you have willed to be your sons, my masters, whom you have commanded me to serve if I want to live with you and from you. And this word of yours would have meant little to me if it had only commanded by speaking and had not also gone ahead by doing. So I do it in deeds and in words; I do it under your wings, in very great danger—except that under your wings my soul is subject to you, and my weakness is known to you. I am a little child, but my Father lives forever, and my guardian is sufficient for me. For the one who begot me is the same who watches over me; and you yourself are all my good, you the Almighty, who are with me even before I am with you. So to such people as you command me to serve I will reveal, not what I was, but what I now am and what I still am. "But I do not judge myself." So let me be heard in that spirit.

10.5.7 For it is you, Lord, who judge me. Although "no one knows the things of a human being except the human spirit within him," there is yet something in a human being that not even the human spirit within him knows. But you, Lord, know everything about him, for you made him. And I, though in your

5 Psalm 144:7–8.
6 Psalm 51:1.

sight I despise myself and count myself dust and ashes, still know something about you that I do not know about myself. Certainly "we see now through a mirror, in a riddle," not yet "face to face." And so, as long as I am on pilgrimage away from you, I am more present to myself than to you; and yet I know that you cannot be harmed in any way, whereas I do not know which temptations I can resist and which I cannot.[7] And there is hope, because you are faithful: you do not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear, but with the temptation you also provide a way out, so that we can endure it. Let me confess, then, what I know about myself; let me confess also what I do not know about myself. For what I know about myself I know because you shine on me; and what I do not know about myself I will go on not knowing until my darkness becomes like noonday before your face.[8]

WHAT DO I LOVE WHEN I LOVE MY GOD?

Augustine asks earth, sea and sky what he loves in God, and they point beyond themselves.

10.6.8 Not with doubtful but with certain awareness, Lord, I love you. You struck my heart with your word, and I loved you. But heaven and earth, too, and everything in them—look, on every side they tell me to love you, and they never stop telling everyone, "so that they are without excuse." But more deeply you "will have mercy on whom you have had mercy, and show mercy to whom you have been merciful"; otherwise heaven and earth speak your praises to the deaf. But what do I love, when I love you? Not the beauty of a body, nor the charm of passing time; not the brightness of light—look how friendly it is to these eyes; not sweet melodies of songs of every kind; not the fragrance of flowers and ointments and spices; not manna and honey; not limbs welcome to the embraces of the flesh. It is not these I love when I love my God. And yet I do love a kind of light, and a kind

7 1 Corinthians 4:4; Genesis 18:27; 2 Corinthians 5:6.
8 1 Corinthians 10:13; Isaiah 58:10.

of voice, and a kind of fragrance, and a kind of food, and a kind of embrace, when I love my God—the light, the voice, the fragrance, the food, the embrace of my inner self, where there shines for my soul what no place can contain, where there sounds what time does not snatch away, where there is a fragrance no breeze scatters, where there is a taste no eating diminishes, where there is a clinging no fullness pulls apart. This is what I love when I love my God.

10.6.9 And what is this? I asked the earth, and it said, "I am not he"; and everything in it confessed the same. I asked the sea and the depths and the creeping things with living souls, and they answered, "We are not your God; look above us." I asked the breezes that blow, and the whole air with its inhabitants said, "Anaximenes is mistaken; I am not God." I asked the sky, the sun, the moon, the stars: "Nor are we the God you seek," they say. And I said to all the things that stand around the doors of my flesh, "Tell me about my God, since you are not he; tell me something about him." And they cried out with a loud voice, "He made us." My questioning was my attention, and their answer was their beauty.[9] And I turned toward myself and said to myself, "Who are you?" And I answered, "A human being." And look, a body and a soul are here at hand in me, the one outer, the other inner. Through which of these should I have sought my God—the God I had already sought through the body, from earth to heaven, as far as I could send the rays of my eyes as messengers? But the inner is the better. For it was to the inner that all the bodily messengers reported back, as to one presiding and judging over the answers of sky and earth and all things in them, which said, "We are not God," and, "He made us." The inner self came to know these things through the service of the outer. I, the inner self, knew them—I, I the mind—through the senses of my body. I asked the whole mass of the world about my God, and it answered me, "I am not he; but he made me."

10.6.10 Is not this beauty apparent to everyone whose senses are sound? Then why does it not say the same thing to all? Animals

small and great see it, but they cannot question it, for in them reason is not set as judge over the reports of the senses. Human beings, however, can question it, so that they may clearly see "the invisible things of God, understood through the things that have been made"; but by loving these things they become subject to them, and once subject they cannot judge. Nor do these things answer those who question them unless those who question also judge. Nor do they change their voice—that is, their beauty—if one person merely sees while another sees and questions, so as to appear one way to the first and another way to the second; rather, appearing the same way to both, it is mute to the one and speaks to the other. Or rather, it speaks to all, but only those understand who compare the voice received from outside with the truth within. For truth says to me, "Your God is not earth and sky, nor any body." Their own nature says this. Do you see? It is mass, less in a part than in the whole. You are already better, I tell you, my soul, for you animate the mass of your body by giving it life, which no body gives to a body. But your God is, even for you, the life of your life.

10.7.11 What, then, do I love, when I love my God? Who is he who is above the head of my soul? Through my soul itself I will climb up to him. I will pass beyond that power of mine by which I cling to the body and fill its frame with life. It is not by that power that I find my God; otherwise "the horse and the mule, which have no understanding," would find him too, since it is the same power by which their bodies also live. There is another power, by which I not only give life to my flesh but also give it sensation—the flesh the Lord fashioned for me, commanding the eye not to hear and the ear not to see, but the one to be that through which I see, the other that through which I hear, and assigning to each of the other senses its own seat and its own function. These various things I do through them, I, one single

9 Anaximenes: Greek philosopher of the sixth century BC who held that air is the source of all things.

mind.[10] I will pass beyond this power of mine too, for the horse and the mule have it as well: they too perceive through the body.

THE FIELDS AND PALACES OF MEMORY

Augustine explores the vast storehouse of memory, holding images, skills, ideas and emotions.

10.8.12 So I will pass beyond this faculty of my nature too, climbing by steps toward him who made me, and I come to the fields and spacious palaces of memory, where lie the treasures of countless images of every kind of thing, brought in by the senses. There is stored whatever we also think, whether by enlarging or diminishing or in any way altering what the senses have touched, and anything else that has been entrusted and laid up there and that forgetfulness has not yet swallowed and buried. When I am there, I ask for whatever I want to be brought out. Some things come forth at once; some are sought for longer and dug out, as it were, from more hidden storerooms; some rush out in crowds, and while something else is being asked for and sought, they leap out into the middle as if to say, "Is it perhaps us?" And I brush them away with the hand of my heart from the face of my remembering, until what I want emerges from the cloud and comes forth into view from its hiding places. Other things present themselves easily and in unbroken order, just as they are called for; those that come first give way to those that follow, and in giving way they are put back, to come forth again when I wish. All this happens when I recount something from memory.

10.8.13 There all things are kept distinct and sorted by kind, each brought in by its own entrance: light and all colors and the shapes of bodies through the eyes; every kind of sound through the ears; all smells through the entrance of the nostrils; all tastes through the entrance of the mouth; and from the sense of the whole body, what is hard, what soft, what hot or cold, smooth or rough, heavy or light, whether outside the body or within it. All

10 Psalm 32:9.

these are received, to be recalled and reconsidered when needed, by the great recess of memory and by its secret and indescribable folds, whatever they are. All these enter it, each by its own door, and are stored in it. Yet the things themselves do not enter; rather, the images of things perceived are there, ready for the thought that recalls them. How these images were fashioned, who can say? Yet it is plain by which senses they were seized and stored within. For even while I remain in darkness and silence, I can bring out colors in my memory if I wish, and distinguish between white and black and between any others I like; nor do sounds rush in and disturb what I am considering, which was drawn in through the eyes, though they too are there, lying hidden as if stored apart. For I call for them too, if I please, and at once they are present; and with my tongue at rest and my throat silent I sing as much as I like; and those images of colors, which are there all the same, do not intrude or interrupt when I handle the other treasure, the one that flowed in through the ears. So too I recall at will the other things brought in and heaped up by the other senses: I tell the scent of lilies from that of violets while smelling nothing, and I prefer honey to boiled-down wine, smooth to rough, not by tasting or touching anything at the time, but by remembering.

10.8.14 I do these things within, in the vast hall of my memory. For there sky and earth and sea are at hand for me, together with everything I have been able to perceive in them, except what I have forgotten. There I also meet myself and recall myself—what I did, when and where, and how I felt when I did it. There is everything I remember, whether I experienced it myself or believed it on others' word. From the same store I also weave, now one and now another, likenesses of things, whether experienced by me or believed on the basis of what I have experienced, and join them to the past; and from these I also weave future actions and events and hopes, and I consider all these again as if they were present. "I will do this and that," I say to myself in that vast bosom of my mind, full of images of so many and such great things, and this or that follows. "Oh, if only this

or that would happen!" "God forbid this or that!" I say these things to myself, and as I say them, the images of all that I say are at hand from that same treasury of memory; nor could I say any of them at all if the images were missing.

10.8.15 Great is this power of memory, exceedingly great, my God—a vast and boundless inner chamber. Who has ever reached its bottom? And this is a power of my mind and belongs to my nature, and yet I myself do not grasp all that I am. Is the mind, then, too narrow to hold itself? Then where is that part of itself that it does not hold? Outside itself, and not in itself? Then how does it not hold it? Great wonder rises in me at this; astonishment seizes me. And people go out to marvel at the heights of mountains, the huge waves of the sea, the broad courses of rivers, the circuit of the ocean, and the orbits of the stars—and they pass themselves by. They do not marvel that when I was speaking of all these things I was not seeing them with my eyes; and yet I could not have spoken of them unless I were seeing inwardly, in my memory, the mountains and waves and rivers and stars that I have seen, and the ocean that I know by report, with spaces as vast as if I were seeing them outside. Yet in seeing them with my eyes I did not swallow them up; the things themselves are not in me, only their images; and I know which image was stamped on me by which bodily sense.

10.9.16 But these are not the only things that this immense capacity of my memory carries. Here too is everything learned from the liberal arts that has not yet slipped away—set apart, as it were, in an inner place that is no place. And of these I carry not images, but the things themselves. For what grammar is, what skill in debate is, how many kinds of question there are—whatever I know of these is in my memory, not in such a way that I have kept an image and left the thing outside. Nor did it sound and pass away, like a voice that leaves through the ears an impression, a trace by which it can be recalled as if it were sounding when it no longer sounds; nor like a smell which, as it passes and fades into the winds, affects the sense of smell and so conveys into memory an image of itself that we can call up again

by remembering; nor like food, which certainly has no taste once in the stomach and yet in memory still has a kind of taste; nor like something perceived by bodily touch, which memory pictures even when it is separated from us. For those things are not let into memory; only their images are caught, with wonderful speed, and stored in wonderful compartments, as it were, and wonderfully brought out again by remembering.

10.10.17 But when I hear that there are three kinds of question—whether a thing is, what it is, and of what sort it is—I do hold images of the sounds of which these words are made, and I know that they passed through the air with a noise and now no longer exist. But the things themselves that those sounds signify I have neither reached by any bodily sense nor seen anywhere except in my mind; and what I have stored in memory is not their images but the things themselves. Let them say, if they can, where they came into me from. For I run through all the doors of my flesh and cannot find by which of them they entered. For the eyes say, "If they have color, we reported them." The ears say, "If they made a sound, it was we who announced them." The nostrils say, "If they had a smell, they passed through us." The sense of taste says too, "If there is no flavor, do not ask me." Touch says, "If it has no body, I did not handle it; if I did not handle it, I reported nothing." From where, then, and by what way did these things enter my memory? I do not know how. For when I learned them, I did not take them on trust from another's heart; I recognized them in my own, and approved them as true, and entrusted them to it, as though putting them away where I could bring them out whenever I wanted. So they were there even before I learned them, but they were not in memory. Where, then, or why, when they were spoken, did I recognize them and say, "That is so, it is true," unless they were already in my memory, but so far away and pushed so far back, as if in hidden hollows, that unless someone prompted me to dig them out, I might perhaps have been unable to think of them?

10.11.18 So we find that learning these things—things whose images we do not draw in through the senses, but which we per-

ceive within, without images, as they are in themselves—is nothing other than this: by thinking, to gather together, as it were, what memory held scattered and in disorder, and by paying attention to see that they are placed, as it were, close at hand in memory itself, where before they lay hidden, scattered and neglected, so that now they readily come forward to an attention grown familiar with them. And how many things of this kind my memory carries, things already found and, as I said, placed as if close at hand—things we are said to have learned and to know! If I stop recalling them for even brief stretches of time, they sink back down and slip away, as it were, into more remote chambers, so that they have to be thought out again, as though new, from the same place (for they have no other home), and gathered again so that they can be known—that is, collected, as it were, out of a kind of scattering. That is where the word *cogitare*, "to think," comes from. For *cogo* ("I gather") and *cogito* ("I think") are related as *ago* and *agito*, *facio* and *factito*. Yet the mind has claimed this word as properly its own, so that what is gathered—that is, "brought together"—not anywhere else but in the mind is now properly said to be "thought."[11]

10.12.19 Memory also contains the principles and countless laws of numbers and dimensions, none of which any bodily sense has imprinted on it, since they have no color, make no sound, have no smell, and have been neither tasted nor touched. I have heard the sounds of the words by which they are signified when they are discussed; but the sounds are one thing, the principles another. For the sounds are different in Greek and in Latin, but the principles are neither Greek nor Latin nor any other kind of language. I have seen lines drawn by craftsmen, some of them very fine, like a spider's thread; but the lines I mean are something else: they are not images of the lines the eye of my flesh reported to me. Anyone knows them who has recognized them within, without thinking of any body whatsoever. I have also perceived with all the senses of the body the numbers of the

11 *Agito* ("I keep driving") and *factito* ("I keep doing") are frequentative forms of *ago* and *facio*; Augustine takes *cogito* likewise as a form of *cogo*.

things we count; but the numbers by which we count are different: they are not images of those, and therefore they truly are. Let anyone who does not see them laugh at me for saying this; and I will grieve for him as he laughs at me.

10.13.20 All these I hold in memory, and I hold in memory how I learned them. I have also heard many utterly false arguments against them, and I hold them in memory too. Even though these are false, it is not false that I remember them. And I remember too that I distinguished between those truths and these falsehoods that are urged against them; and I see that distinguishing them now is one thing, and remembering that I often distinguished them, when I often thought about them, is another. So I remember that I have often understood these things; and what I now distinguish and understand I store in memory, so that later I may remember that I understood it now. So I remember that I remembered; just as later, if I recall that I was able to remember these things now, it will certainly be by the power of memory that I recall it.

10.14.21 The same memory also contains the feelings of my mind —not in the way the mind itself has them when it undergoes them, but in another, very different way, as befits the power of memory. For I remember that I was glad without being glad; I recall my past sadness without being sad; I recollect that I was once afraid, without fear; and I am mindful of a former craving without craving. Sometimes, on the contrary, I remember my past sadness with gladness, and my gladness with sadness. This is not surprising in the case of the body, for the mind is one thing and the body another. So if I remember a past bodily pain with joy, that is not so strange. But here the mind is also memory itself. For when we tell someone to remember something, we say, "See that you keep it in mind"; and when we forget, we say, "It was not in my mind" and "It slipped my mind," calling memory itself the mind. This being so, what is happening when, as I remember my past sadness with gladness, the mind has gladness and the memory has sadness—and the mind is glad because gladness is in it, while the memory is not sad

although sadness is in it? Can it be that memory does not belong to the mind? Who would say that? No doubt, then, memory is like the stomach of the mind, and gladness and sadness like sweet and bitter food: when they are committed to memory, they are as it were passed into the stomach—they can be stored there, but they cannot be tasted. It is absurd to think these things are like those; and yet they are not altogether unlike.

10.14.22 But look: when I say that there are four disturbances of the mind—craving, gladness, fear, sadness—it is from memory that I bring this out. And whatever I can say in discussing them, by dividing each into the species of its own genus and defining them, it is there that I find what to say and from there that I bring it out; and yet I am not disturbed by any of these disturbances when I call them to mind by remembering. Even before I recollected and reconsidered them, they were there; that is why they could be drawn out from there by recollection. Perhaps, then, just as food is brought up from the stomach by chewing the cud, so these are brought up from memory by recalling. Why, then, does the one who discusses them—that is, who remembers them—not taste in the mouth of thought the sweetness of gladness or the bitterness of grief? Or is the unlikeness just this, that the likeness is not complete? For who would willingly speak of such things if, every time we named sadness or fear, we were forced to grieve or be afraid?[12] And yet we could not speak of them unless we found in our memory not only the sounds of their names, according to images imprinted by the bodily senses, but also notions of the things themselves. These we did not receive through any door of the flesh; rather, the mind itself, perceiving them through the experience of its own passions, entrusted them to memory, or else memory itself retained them even without their being entrusted to it.

10.15.23 But whether this happens through images or not, who could easily say? I name a stone, I name the sun, when the things themselves are not present to my senses; but their images are certainly at hand in my memory. I name bodily pain, and it

12 The four passions of Stoic ethics, familiar to Augustine from Cicero.

is not present to me when nothing hurts; yet unless its image were present in my memory, I would not know what I was saying, nor could I tell it apart from pleasure when discussing it. I name bodily health when I am healthy in body; the thing itself is indeed present to me. Yet unless its image were also in my memory, I could in no way recall what the sound of this word meant; nor would the sick recognize what had been said when health was named, unless the same image were held by the power of memory, though the thing itself was absent from their bodies. I name the numbers by which we count: see, they are present in my memory—not their images, but the numbers themselves. I name the image of the sun, and this too is present in my memory; for what I recall is not the image of its image, but the image itself: it is itself at hand for me as I remember. I name memory, and I recognize what I name. And where do I recognize it, if not in memory itself? Is memory, too, present to itself through its image, and not through itself?

REMEMBERING FORGETFULNESS

Augustine puzzles over how he can remember forgetfulness itself, and searches for God beyond memory.

10.16.24 What about when I name forgetfulness and likewise recognize what I name—how could I recognize it unless I remembered it? I do not mean the sound of the word, but the thing it signifies. If I had forgotten that, I would certainly be unable to recognize what the sound meant. So when I remember memory, memory itself is present to itself through itself. But when I remember forgetfulness, both memory and forgetfulness are present: memory, by which I remember, and forgetfulness, which I remember. But what is forgetfulness except the absence of memory? How, then, is it present so that I remember it, when while it is present I cannot remember? And yet if what we remember we retain in memory, and if, unless we remembered forgetfulness, we could never recognize on hearing the word the thing it signifies, then forgetfulness is retained by memory. So it

is present so that we do not forget—the very thing whose presence makes us forget. Or should we understand from this that when we remember forgetfulness, it is in memory not through itself but through its image—since if forgetfulness were present through itself, it would make us not remember but forget? And who, in the end, will track this down? Who will grasp how it is?

10.16.25 I, certainly, Lord, am laboring over this, and laboring over myself. I have become to myself a land of hardship and heavy sweat. For we are not now searching out the regions of the sky, or measuring the distances of the stars, or inquiring into how the earth is balanced. It is I who remember, I, the mind. It is not so surprising if whatever I am not is far from me; but what is nearer to me than myself? And look, the power of my memory is beyond my grasp, though without it I cannot even speak of myself. What, then, am I to say, when I am certain that I remember forgetfulness? Am I to say that what I remember is not in my memory? Or am I to say that forgetfulness is in my memory so that I may not forget? Both are utterly absurd. What about a third possibility? How can I say that what my memory holds, when I remember forgetfulness, is an image of forgetfulness and not forgetfulness itself? How can I say even that, since when the image of any thing is imprinted on the memory, the thing itself must first be present, so that the image can be imprinted from it? That is how I remember Carthage, and all the places I have been; that is how I remember the faces of the people I have seen, and what the other senses have reported; that is how I remember the health or pain of my own body. When these things were present, memory took images from them, which I could look at as present and go over again in my mind when I recalled those things in their absence. So if forgetfulness is held in memory through its image and not through itself, then it must certainly have been present itself for its image to be taken. But when it was present, how did it write its image in the memory, when forgetfulness by its very presence erases even what it finds already recorded there? And yet, in whatever way it happens—even if that way is beyond grasping

and beyond explaining—I am certain that I remember forgetfulness itself, by which what we remember is buried.

10.17.26 Great is the power of memory, something awe-inspiring, my God: a deep and boundless manifoldness. And this is the mind, and this is I myself. What, then, am I, my God? What is my nature? A life varied, many-sided, and utterly immeasurable. Look at the fields and caves and caverns of my memory, countless and countlessly full of countless kinds of things—some present as images, like all bodies; some present in themselves, like the arts; some present as I know not what notions or notations, like the feelings of the mind (which memory keeps even when the mind is not undergoing them, although whatever is in memory is in the mind). Through all of these I run and fly this way and that; I even go as deep as I can, and there is no end anywhere. So great is the power of memory, so great the power of life in a human being who lives as a mortal! What then shall I do, you my true life, my God? I will pass beyond even this power of mine that is called memory; I will pass beyond it to reach you, sweet light. What do you say to me? See, I am climbing up through my mind to you, who abide above me; I will pass beyond even this power of mine that is called memory, wanting to reach you where you can be reached, and to cling to you where one can cling to you. For cattle and birds have memory too; otherwise they would not find their way back to their dens and nests, nor to the many other things they grow used to—for they could not grow used to anything at all except through memory. So I will pass beyond memory as well, to reach him who set me apart from four-footed beasts and made me wiser than the birds of the sky. I will pass beyond memory too—but where shall I find you, truly good one, sweetness that is secure? Where shall I find you? If I find you outside my memory, I am unmindful of you. And how shall I find you, then, if I do not remember you?

10.18.27 For the woman had lost her coin and searched for it with a lamp; and unless she had remembered it, she would not have found it. For when it was found, how would she know whether it was the one, if she did not remember it? I remember having

searched for and found many things I had lost. That is how I know this: when I was looking for one of them and someone said to me, "Is this it, perhaps?" "Is it that?" I kept saying, "No," until what I was looking for was offered to me. If I had not remembered it, whatever it was, I would not have found it even when it was offered to me, because I would not have recognized it. And it is always like this when we look for something lost and find it. But if some thing is lost to the eyes and not to memory—any visible body, say—its image is kept within, and it is searched for until it is restored to sight. And when it has been found, it is recognized from the image that is within.[13] We do not say we have found what was lost if we do not recognize it, and we cannot recognize it if we do not remember it. This thing was lost to the eyes, then, but it was held in memory.

10.19.28 But what about when memory itself loses something, as happens when we forget and try to recall? Where do we look, in the end, except in memory itself? And there, if one thing happens to be offered in place of another, we reject it until the thing we are looking for turns up. And when it turns up, we say, "That's it"—which we would not say unless we recognized it, and we would not recognize it unless we remembered it. So we had certainly forgotten it. Or had it not slipped away entirely, and was the part still held being used to seek the other part? Memory sensed that it was not turning over together what it used to turn over together; limping, as it were, with its habit cut short, it demanded the return of what was missing. It is like when we see someone we know, or think of them, and try to recall the name we have forgotten: whatever else occurs to us does not connect, because it is not the name we are used to thinking of together with that person, and so it is rejected until the right one comes, in which our familiar knowledge can rest, evenly matched. And where does it come from, if not from memory itself? For even when someone else reminds us and we recognize it, that is where it comes from. We do not accept it as something new; we recall it and confirm that what was said is

13 Luke 15:8–9, the parable of the lost coin.

right. But if it were wiped out of the mind entirely, we would not remember it even when reminded. For we have not yet wholly forgotten what we at least remember having forgotten. So we will not even be able to search for something as lost if we have forgotten it altogether.

SEARCHING FOR THE HAPPY LIFE

Augustine asks how everyone can desire a happy life they remember, and finds it is joy in truth.

10.20.29 How, then, do I seek you, Lord? For when I seek you, my God, I seek the happy life. Let me seek you so that my soul may live. For my body lives by my soul, and my soul lives by you. How, then, do I seek the happy life? For I do not have it until I can say, "Enough—it is there." Here I must say how I seek it: whether through recollection, as though I had forgotten it and still keep hold of the fact that I have forgotten it; or through a desire to learn something unknown, either something I never knew, or something I have so forgotten that I do not even remember having forgotten it. Is not the happy life the very thing that everyone wants, so that there is absolutely no one who does not want it? Where did they come to know it, that they want it so? Where did they see it, that they should love it? Certainly we have it, in some way I do not know. And there is another way of having it, in which a person, when he has it, is then happy; and there are those who are happy in hope. These have it in a lower way than those who are already happy in reality, but they are still better off than those who are happy neither in reality nor in hope. Yet even these last, unless they had it in some way, would not want so much to be happy—and it is quite certain that they do want it. Somehow or other they have come to know it, and so they have it in some kind of knowledge. About this knowledge I am anxious to find out whether it is in memory. For if it is there, then we were once happy. Whether each of us individually, or all of us in that man who first sinned, in whom we all died and from whom we are all born into misery, I am not

asking now. What I am asking is whether the happy life is in memory.[14] For we would not love it unless we knew it. We hear this name, and all of us confess that it is the thing itself we desire; for it is not the sound that delights us. When a Greek hears it said in Latin, he is not delighted, because he does not know what has been said. But we are delighted, just as he would be if he heard it in Greek, because the thing itself is neither Greek nor Latin—the thing that Greeks and Latins and people of every other language long to attain. So it is known to everyone; and if they could all be asked with one voice whether they want to be happy, they would answer without any hesitation that they do. That could not happen unless the thing itself, of which this is the name, were held in their memory.

10.21.30 Is it the way someone who has seen Carthage remembers it? No. For the happy life is not seen with the eyes, because it is not a body. Is it the way we remember numbers? No. Whoever has numbers in his knowledge does not still seek to attain them; but the happy life we have in our knowledge, and so we love it, and yet we still want to attain it, so that we may be happy. Is it the way we remember eloquence? No. It is true that when they hear this name, people recall the thing itself even if they are not yet eloquent, and many want to be (which shows that it is in their knowledge). Yet they have noticed other people being eloquent through the bodily senses, and have been delighted, and long to be so themselves—though they would not be delighted except from an inner knowledge, and they would not want to be so unless they were delighted. But the happy life we do not experience in others through any bodily sense. Is it the way we remember joy? Perhaps so. For I remember my joy even when I am sad, just as I remember the happy life when I am miserable; and I have never seen or heard or smelled or tasted or touched my joy with any bodily sense. I experienced it in my mind when I rejoiced, and the knowledge of it stuck to my memory, so that I can recall it—sometimes with disgust, sometimes with longing, depending on the different things I remem-

14 Adam, in whom "all die" (1 Corinthians 15:22).

ber having rejoiced in. For I have been flooded with a kind of joy over shameful things, which I now recall with loathing and abhorrence; and sometimes over things good and honorable, which I recall with longing, even though perhaps they are no longer present—and so I recall my former joy with sadness.

10.21.31 Where, then, and when did I experience my happy life, so that I remember it and love it and long for it? And not only I, or I and a few others: we all without exception want to be happy. If we did not know it with a sure knowledge, we would not want it with so sure a will. But what is this? If two people are asked whether they want to serve in the army, it may be that one of them answers that he does and the other that he does not. But if they are asked whether they want to be happy, both would at once say, without any hesitation, that they wish it; and the one wants to serve and the other does not for no other reason than to be happy. Is it, perhaps, that one finds joy in this and another in that? So all agree that they want to be happy, just as they would agree if they were asked whether they want to rejoice—and it is joy itself that they call the happy life. Even if one pursues it here and another there, still there is one thing that all are striving to reach: to rejoice. And since this is something no one can say he has never experienced, it is found in memory and recognized when the name "happy life" is heard.

10.22.32 Far be it, Lord, far be it from the heart of your servant who confesses to you—far be it from me to think myself happy in any joy whatever. For there is a joy that is not given to the ungodly, but to those who worship you for your own sake, whose joy you yourself are. And this is the happy life: to rejoice toward you, in you, because of you. This is it, and there is no other. Those who think there is another pursue another joy, and not the true one. Yet their will is not turned away from some image of joy.

10.23.33 So it is not certain that all want to be happy, since those who do not want to rejoice in you—which alone is the happy life—do not really want the happy life. Or do all want it, but because "the flesh desires against the spirit and the spirit against the

flesh," so that they do not do what they want, they fall back on what they are able to do and are content with that—because what they are not able to do, they do not want enough to be able to do it? For I ask everyone whether they would rather rejoice in truth or in falsehood. They are as quick to say they would rather rejoice in truth as they are to say they want to be happy. For the happy life is joy in the truth. That is, it is joy in you, who are the truth, O God, my light, the health of my face, my God.[15] This happy life everyone wants; this life, which alone is happy, everyone wants; joy in the truth everyone wants. I have known many who wanted to deceive, but no one who wanted to be deceived. Where, then, did they come to know this happy life, if not where they also came to know the truth? For they love truth too, since they do not want to be deceived; and when they love the happy life, which is nothing other than joy in the truth, they certainly love the truth as well—and they would not love it unless there were some knowledge of it in their memory. Why, then, do they not rejoice in it? Why are they not happy? Because they are more strongly taken up with other things, which have more power to make them miserable than that which they remember so faintly has to make them happy. For there is still a little light in human beings. Let them walk, let them walk, so that the darkness does not overtake them.[16]

10.23.34 But why does truth give birth to hatred? Why did your servant, who preached the truth, become their enemy, when the happy life is loved, and it is nothing but joy in the truth? Surely it is because truth is loved in such a way that those who love something else want what they love to be the truth; and since they would not want to be deceived, they do not want to be shown that they are wrong. So they hate the truth for the sake of the very thing they love in place of the truth. They love truth when it shines, and hate it when it rebukes. Because they do not want to be deceived and do want to deceive, they love it when it

15 "My light" and "the health of my face" echo Psalms 27:1 and 42:11.
16 John 12:35: "Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness does not overtake you."

reveals itself, and hate it when it reveals them. So it will pay them back: those who do not want to be revealed by it, it will reveal against their will, and it will not reveal itself to them.[17] So, so, even so is the human mind: even so blind and sick, foul and unseemly, it wants to lie hidden, yet it does not want anything to lie hidden from it. It is repaid in the opposite way: it does not lie hidden from the truth, but the truth lies hidden from it. Yet even so, while it is miserable, it would rather rejoice in what is true than in what is false. So it will be happy when, with no trouble interfering, it rejoices in truth alone—the very truth by which all things are true.

FINDING GOD IN MEMORY

Augustine realizes God has dwelt in his memory ever since he first learned of him.

10.24.35 See how far I have ranged through my memory looking for you, Lord, and I have not found you outside it. Nor have I found anything about you that I did not remember from the time I first learned of you; for since I learned of you I have not forgotten you. Where I found truth, there I found my God, truth itself, which I have not forgotten since I learned it. So since I learned of you, you abide in my memory, and there I find you when I call you to mind and delight in you. These are my holy delights, which you gave me in your mercy, looking upon my poverty.

10.25.36 But where in my memory do you abide, Lord—where do you abide there? What resting place have you fashioned for yourself? What sanctuary have you built for yourself? You have granted my memory the honor of your abiding in it; but in what part of it you abide—that is what I am considering. When I called you to mind, I passed beyond the parts of it that beasts also have, because I did not find you there among the images of bodily things. And I came to the parts where I have stored the feelings of my mind, and I did not find you there either. And I entered the seat of my mind itself, which it has in my memory,

17 Echoing Galatians 4:16, "Have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?"

since the mind remembers itself too—and you were not there. For just as you are not a bodily image, nor a feeling of a living being, such as when we are glad, grieve, desire, fear, remember, forget, and so on, so neither are you the mind itself, because you are the Lord God of the mind. All these things change, but you abide unchangeable above all things; and yet you have deigned to dwell in my memory since I learned of you. And why do I ask in what place in it you dwell, as if there really were places there? Certainly you dwell in it, because I remember you since I learned of you, and I find you in it when I call you to mind.

10.26.37 Where, then, did I find you, so as to learn of you? For you were not in my memory before I learned of you. Where, then, did I find you, so as to learn of you, if not in you, above me? And there is no place anywhere; we go back and we come forward, and there is no place anywhere. O Truth, everywhere you preside over all who consult you, and you answer all at once, even those who consult you about different things. You answer clearly, but not all hear clearly. All consult you about what they want, but they do not always hear what they want. Your best servant is the one who is less intent on hearing from you what he himself wanted than on wanting what he has heard from you.

LATE HAVE I LOVED YOU

Augustine laments loving God so late, since God was within him while he searched outside.

10.27.38 Late have I loved you, beauty so ancient and so new, late have I loved you! And look: you were within, and I was outside, and there I looked for you, and, misshapen as I was, I rushed headlong into those shapely things that you have made. You were with me, and I was not with you. Those things kept me far from you which, if they were not in you, would not be at all. You called and cried out and broke through my deafness; you flashed, you shone, and you put my blindness to flight; you breathed your fragrance, and I drew breath and now pant for

you; I tasted, and now I hunger and thirst; you touched me, and I burned for your peace.

10.28.39 When I cling to you with all of myself, there will be no more pain or toil for me anywhere, and my life will be alive, wholly full of you. But now—since the one you fill you lift up, and I am not full of you—I am a burden to myself. My joys, which ought to be wept over, contend with my sorrows, which ought to be rejoiced in, and I do not know which side will win. My evil sorrows contend with my good joys, and I do not know which side will win. Ah, me! Lord, have mercy on me! Ah, me! See, I do not hide my wounds. You are the physician, I am sick; you are merciful, I am miserable. Is not human life on earth a trial? Who would want troubles and hardships? You command that they be endured, not loved. No one loves what he endures, even if he loves enduring it. For though he may be glad that he endures, he would still rather there were nothing to endure.[18] In adversity I long for prosperity; in prosperity I fear adversity. What middle ground is there between these, where human life is not a trial? Woe to the prosperities of this world, once and again—from the fear of adversity and from the corruption of joy! Woe to the adversities of this world, once, again, and a third time—from the longing for prosperity, and because adversity itself is hard, and for fear it may break our endurance! Is not human life on earth a trial, without any break at all?

10.29.40 And all my hope is nowhere but in your very great mercy. Give what you command, and command what you will. You enjoin self-control on us. "And when I knew," someone says, "that no one can be self-controlled unless God grants it, this too was a mark of wisdom: to know whose gift this was." For by self-control we are gathered up and brought back into the one from whom we had flowed away into the many. For he loves you too little who loves something together with you that he does not love for your sake. O love, you who are always burning and are never quenched, love, my God, set me on fire! You command

18 Job 7:1.

self-control: give what you command, and command what you will.[19]

TEMPTATIONS OF THE FLESH

Augustine examines lingering temptations of sex in dreams, food and drink, smells and music.

10.30.41 Certainly you command me to refrain from the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the ambition of the world. You commanded me to refrain from sleeping with a woman, and in the matter of marriage itself you advised something better than what you allowed. And since you gave me the power, it was done, even before I became a minister of your sacrament. But there still live in my memory, of which I have said so much, the images of such things, which my habit fixed there. They come at me while I am awake, but then they lack strength; in sleep, however, they bring me not only to pleasure but even to consent and to something very like the act. And the illusion of the image has so much power in my soul and in my flesh that false visions persuade me when asleep to what true ones cannot when I am awake. Am I not myself then, Lord my God?[20] And yet what a great difference there is between myself and myself, within the moment when I pass from here into sleep or pass back from there to here! Where then is the reason by which, when awake, the mind resists such suggestions and remains unshaken even if the things themselves are thrust upon it? Does it close with the eyes? Does it fall asleep with the bodily senses? And how is it that often even in sleep we resist, and, mindful of our resolve and holding to it most chastely, give no consent to such enticements? And yet the difference is so great that when it goes otherwise, we wake and return to peace of conscience, and by that

19 The quotation is Wisdom 8:21. Augustine's prayer "Give what you command" later provoked the objections of Pelagius, who held that human beings can obey God's commands by their own powers.

20 1 John 2:16. The "sacrament" here is the priesthood: Augustine was ordained in 391 and became bishop of Hippo in 395 or 396.

very distance we discover that we did not do what we nevertheless grieve was somehow done in us.

10.30.42 Is your hand not able, almighty God, to heal all the sicknesses of my soul, and by your more abundant grace to quench even the lustful stirrings of my sleep? You will increase your gifts in me more and more, Lord, so that my soul may follow me to you, freed from the birdlime of lust, so that it may not be in rebellion against itself, and so that even in sleep it may not only not commit these shameful corruptions through sensual images to the point of the flesh's discharge, but not even consent to them. For that nothing of the sort should please it—not even so little as could be checked with a nod, even in the chaste feeling of one asleep—and not only in this life but even at this age: this is no great thing for the Almighty, for you who are able to do more than we ask or understand.[21] But now I have told my good Lord what I still am in this kind of evil of mine, rejoicing with trembling in what you have given me, and mourning over what is still unfinished in me, hoping that you will bring your mercies to completion in me until I have full peace, which my inner and outer self will have with you when death is swallowed up in victory.

10.31.43 There is another evil of the day—would that it were enough for the day! For we repair the daily wear and tear of the body by eating and drinking, until you destroy both food and stomach, when you will kill need with a wonderful fullness and clothe this corruptible body with everlasting incorruption. But now this necessity is sweet to me, and I fight against that sweetness so as not to be captured. I wage a daily war by fasting, often bringing my body into subjection, and my pains are driven out by pleasure. For hunger and thirst are pains of a sort: they burn, and like a fever they kill, unless the medicine of food comes to the rescue. And since this is at hand, thanks to the comfort of

21 Echoing Ephesians 3:20.

your gifts, in which earth and water and sky serve our weakness, our affliction is called a delight.[22]

10.31.44 You have taught me this: to come to taking food as I would to taking medicine. But while I pass from the discomfort of need to the rest of fullness, in that very passage the snare of desire lies in wait for me. For the passage itself is a pleasure, and there is no other way to pass over to where necessity compels us to go. And though health is the reason for eating and drinking, a dangerous delight attaches itself like a servant following behind, and often tries to go on ahead, so that what I say or intend to do for health's sake is done for its sake. Nor is the measure the same for both: what is enough for health is too little for pleasure. And it often becomes unclear whether it is the necessary care of the body still asking for support, or a deceptive, pleasure-seeking craving offering its services. At this uncertainty the unhappy soul cheers up and uses it to prepare a defense and an excuse, glad that it is not clear what is enough for the moderate care of health, so that under the pretext of health it may cloak the business of pleasure. I try every day to resist these temptations, and I call upon your right hand, and I bring my turmoil to you, because I have not yet settled on a course in this matter.

10.31.45 I hear the voice of my God commanding: "Do not let your hearts be weighed down with overindulgence and drunkenness." Drunkenness is far from me; you will have mercy, so that it does not come near me. But overindulgence sometimes creeps up on your servant; you will have mercy, so that it is put far from me. For no one can be self-controlled unless you grant it. You give us many things when we pray, and whatever good we received before we prayed, we received from you; and that we should later recognize this, we also received from you. I have never been a drunkard, but I have known drunkards made sober by you. So it was your doing that those who never were drunkards are not, and your doing that those who were are not

22 Matthew 6:34 ("each day has enough trouble of its own"); 1 Corinthians 6:13, 15:53, and 9:27.

so forever, and your doing too that both know whose doing it was.[23] I heard another word of yours: "Do not go after your desires, and turn away from your pleasure." By your gift I also heard this one, which I have loved very much: "If we eat, we shall not have more; and if we do not eat, we shall not lack"—that is to say, "Neither will the one make me rich, nor the other wretched." I heard yet another: "For I have learned to be content in whatever state I am; I know how to have plenty and I know how to go without. I can do all things in him who strengthens me." Here is a soldier of the heavenly army, not the dust that we are. But remember, Lord, that we are dust, and that from dust you made man, and he was lost and has been found. Nor could that man do this in his own strength, for he was the same dust—the man I have come to love for saying such things under the breath of your inspiration: "I can do all things," he says, "in him who strengthens me." Strengthen me, so that I can.[24] Give what you command, and command what you will. He confesses that he has received, and when he boasts, he boasts in the Lord. I have heard another asking to receive: "Take away from me," he says, "the desires of the belly." From which it is clear, my holy God, that it is you who give, when what you command to be done is done.[25]

10.31.46 You have taught me, good Father, that "to the pure all things are pure," but that "it is wrong for anyone to eat what causes offense"; that "everything you have created is good, and nothing is to be rejected that is received with thanksgiving"; that "food does not commend us to God"; that "no one should judge us in matters of food or drink"; and that "the one who eats should not despise the one who does not, and the one who does not eat should not judge the one who does." I have learned these things. Thanks to you, praise to you, my God, my teacher, who knock at my ears and shed light on my heart. Rescue me from

23 Luke 21:34.
24 Sirach 18:30; 1 Corinthians 8:8; Philippians 4:11–13 (Paul); Psalm 103:14; Luke 15:24.
25 Sirach 23:6.

every temptation. It is not the uncleanness of food that I fear, but the uncleanness of craving. I know that Noah was permitted to eat every kind of meat that was fit for food; that Elijah was restored by eating meat; and that John, endowed with wonderful abstinence, was not defiled by the living creatures—that is, the locusts—that he took for food.[26] And I know that Esau was deceived by his desire for lentils, and that David blamed himself for his longing for water, and that our King was tempted not with meat but with bread. And so the people in the wilderness deserved to be condemned, not because they desired meat, but because in their desire for food they grumbled against the Lord.[27]

10.31.47 Set among these temptations, then, I struggle every day against the desire to eat and drink. For this is not something I can resolve to cut off once and for all and never touch again, as I was able to do with sleeping with a woman. So the reins of the throat must be held with a moderate slackening and tightening. And who is there, Lord, who is not carried a little beyond the limits of necessity? Whoever he is, he is great; let him magnify your name. But I am not he, for I am a sinful man. Yet I too magnify your name, and he who has overcome the world intercedes with you for my sins, counting me among the weak members of his body; for your eyes have seen what is imperfect in him, and in your book all will be written.[28]

10.32.48 About the allure of scents I am not much troubled. When they are absent I do not look for them; when they are present I do not refuse them; and I am ready to do without them always. So it seems to me; perhaps I am deceived. For this too is a darkness to be lamented, in which the capacity that is in me is hidden from me, so that my mind, questioning itself about its own strength, does not think it can easily trust itself. For what is in it is usually hidden unless experience brings it to light. And

26 Titus 1:15; Romans 14:20; 1 Timothy 4:4; Colossians 2:16; Romans 14:3. For Noah, Elijah, and John the Baptist, see Genesis 9:3, 1 Kings 17:6, and Matthew 3:4.
27 2 Samuel 23:15–17; Matthew 4:3 (Christ tempted to turn stones into bread); Numbers 11.
28 John 16:33; Romans 8:34; Psalm 139:16.

no one ought to feel sure, in this life, which is called one long trial, that someone who could change from worse to better may not also change from better to worse. My one hope, my one confidence, my one firm promise is your mercy.

10.33.49 The pleasures of the ear had entangled and subdued me more tightly, but you set me loose and freed me. Now, I confess, when your words give life to sounds sung with a sweet and skilled voice, I do rest in them a little—not so as to cling to them, but so that I can rise up when I wish. Yet together with the words by which they live and gain admission to me, they seek a place of some dignity in my heart, and I can hardly offer them a fitting one. For sometimes I seem to myself to give them more honor than is proper, when I feel that our minds are moved to the flame of devotion more religiously and more ardently by the holy words themselves when they are sung this way than if they were not; and that all the feelings of our spirit, in their variety, have their own proper modes in voice and song, by some hidden kinship with which they are stirred. But the delight of my flesh, to which the mind ought not to be handed over to be weakened, often deceives me, when the senses do not accompany reason in such a way as to follow patiently behind, but, just because they were let in for reason's sake, try even to run ahead and take the lead. So in these things I sin without noticing, and notice afterward.

10.33.50 But sometimes, guarding too anxiously against this very deception, I err by too much severity—at times so much that I would want every melody of the sweet chants to which David's Psalter is set banished from my ears and from those of the church itself. And the safer course seems to me the one I remember often being told about Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, who had the reader of the psalm use so slight an inflection of the voice that it was closer to speaking than to singing. And yet when I remember the tears I shed at the church's songs in the early days of my recovered faith, and how even now I am admonished not by the singing but by the things that are sung, when they are sung with a clear voice and the most fitting

melody, I acknowledge once more the great usefulness of this practice.[29] So I waver between the danger of pleasure and the experience of benefit, and I am inclined more—though I offer no irrevocable opinion—to approve the custom of singing in church, so that through the delights of the ears the weaker mind may rise up to the feeling of devotion. Yet when it happens that the singing moves me more than what is sung, I confess that I sin and deserve punishment, and then I would rather not hear the singer. See where I stand! Weep with me and weep for me, you who inwardly do some good with yourselves, from which deeds proceed. As for you who do not, these things do not move you. But you, Lord my God, hear me: look and see, have mercy and heal me—you in whose eyes I have become a question to myself, and that is my sickness.

10.34.51 There remains the pleasure of these eyes of my flesh, about which I will make my confessions for the ears of your temple to hear, brotherly and devout ears, so that we may bring to an end the temptations of the desire of the flesh that still assail me as I groan and long to be clothed with my dwelling that is from heaven. The eyes love beautiful and varied shapes, bright and pleasant colors. Let these not hold my soul; let God hold it, who made these things very good indeed—but he is my good, not they. And they touch me while I am awake all day long, and no rest from them is given me, as rest is given from sounds of singing, and sometimes from all sounds, in silence. For light itself, the queen of colors, bathing everything we see, wherever I may be during the day, caresses me as it glides in upon me in countless ways, while I am doing something else and not paying attention to it.[30] And it works its way in so forcefully that if it is suddenly withdrawn, it is sought with longing; and if it is absent for long, it saddens the mind.

10.34.52 O light that Tobit saw when, with these eyes of his closed, he taught his son the way of life and went ahead of him on the feet of love, never straying; or that Isaac saw, when his

29 Athanasius (c. 296–373), bishop of Alexandria and champion of the Nicene faith.
30 2 Corinthians 5:2.

fleshly eyes were heavy and veiled with old age, and it was granted him to bless his sons not by recognizing them, but to recognize them by blessing them; or that Jacob saw, when he too, blinded by great age, with a luminous heart shed light on the tribes of the people to come, prefigured in his sons, and laid his hands, mystically crossed, on his grandsons by Joseph—not as their father corrected him from outside, but as he himself discerned within. This is the light: it is one, and all who see it and love it are one. But this bodily light I was speaking of seasons the life of this world for its blind lovers with an enticing and dangerous sweetness.[31] But those who know how to praise you even for this light, "God, creator of all things," take it up into your hymn instead of being taken up by it in their sleep. That is how I long to be. I resist the seductions of the eyes, so that my feet, with which I walk your way, may not be entangled; and I lift my invisible eyes to you, that you may pluck my feet out of the snare. Again and again you pluck them out, for they keep getting snared. You never stop plucking them out, though I am often caught in traps scattered everywhere, because you who keep Israel "will neither slumber nor sleep."[32]

10.34.53 How countless are the things people have added, by all kinds of arts and crafts, to entice the eyes—in clothes, shoes, vessels and artifacts of every sort, in pictures too and images of every kind—things that go far beyond necessary and moderate use and any devout meaning. Outwardly they pursue what they make; inwardly they abandon the one who made them and destroy what they were made to be. But I, my God and my glory, even from this sing you a hymn and offer praise as a sacrifice to the one who sacrifices for me. For the beautiful designs that pass through people's souls into skilled hands come from that Beauty which is above souls, for which my soul sighs day and night. But those who make and pursue outward beauties draw

31 Blind Tobit instructs his son Tobias (Tobit 4); blind Isaac blesses Jacob and Esau (Genesis 27); Jacob crosses his hands over Joseph's sons despite Joseph's protest (Genesis 48).

32 The last words quote Psalm 121:4.

from it their standard for approving them, not their standard for using them. That standard is there, and they do not see it: that they should go no further, and keep their strength for you instead of squandering it on luxurious exhaustion. And I, even as I say and discern these things, still catch my step in these beauties; but you pluck me out, Lord, you pluck me out, because "your mercy is before my eyes." For I am caught wretchedly, and you pluck me out mercifully—sometimes without my feeling it, because I had only lightly fallen in; sometimes painfully, because I had already stuck fast.[33]

CURIOSITY, THE DESIRE OF THE EYES

Augustine examines curiosity, the craving to see and know for its own sake.

10.35.54 To this is added another form of temptation, dangerous in more ways. For besides the desire of the flesh, which lies in the delight of all the senses and pleasures, and whose slaves perish as they go far from you, there is in the soul, through these same bodily senses, a certain empty and curious craving—not to take pleasure in the flesh, but to gain experience through the flesh—cloaked under the name of knowledge and learning. Because it lies in the appetite for knowing, and the eyes are chief among the senses for knowing, it is called in the divine word "the desire of the eyes." Seeing belongs properly to the eyes; yet we use this word for the other senses too, when we apply them to knowing. We do not say, "Hear how it glows," or "Smell how it shines," or "Taste how it gleams," or "Feel how it glitters": all these are said to be seen. Yet we say not only, "See how it shines," which only the eyes can perceive, but also, "See how it sounds," "See how it smells," "See how it tastes," "See how hard it is." So the general experience of the senses is called, as has been said, the desire of the eyes, because the other senses, when they explore anything for knowledge, borrow by analogy the function of seeing, in which the eyes hold first place.

33 Psalm 26:3.

10.35.55 From this one can see more clearly what, in the work of the senses, belongs to pleasure and what to curiosity. Pleasure pursues what is beautiful, melodious, fragrant, tasty and soft; but curiosity pursues even their opposites, for the sake of trying them—not to undergo discomfort, but out of a lust for experiencing and knowing. What pleasure is there in looking at a mangled corpse that makes you shudder? And yet if one is lying somewhere, people flock to it, to be saddened, to turn pale. They are even afraid of seeing it in their dreams—as if anyone had forced them to look at it while awake, or some report of its beauty had persuaded them. So too with the other senses, which it would take long to go through. From this disease of craving, all sorts of marvels are put on display in the shows. From this, people go on to probe the workings of nature, which is not apart from us,, which it does no good to know and which people want to know for nothing but the knowing. From this, too, comes any inquiry by magic arts undertaken with the same aim of perverted knowledge. From this, even in religion itself, God is put to the test, when signs and wonders are demanded, desired not for any salvation but only for the experience.

10.35.56 In this immense forest, so full of traps and dangers, see how much I have cut away and driven from my heart, as you have granted me to do, God of my salvation. And yet when do I dare to say—since so many things of this kind clamor all around our daily life—when do I dare to say that nothing of the sort draws me to watch it and catches me with idle interest? True, the theaters no longer carry me away, nor do I care to know the courses of the stars, nor has my soul ever sought answers from the shades of the dead; I detest all sacrilegious rites. Yet, Lord my God, to whom I owe humble and simple service, with what scheming suggestions the enemy works on me to ask you for some sign! But I beg you, by our King and by our homeland, Jerusalem, simple and chaste, that just as consent to such things is far from me, so it may always be far, and ever farther. But when I ask you for someone's salvation, the aim of my intention is far

different; and as you do what you will, you grant me, and will grant me, to follow you gladly.

10.35.57 Yet in how many tiny and contemptible things our curiosity is tempted every day, and how often we slip—who can count? How often, when people tell idle stories, we at first put up with them, as it were, so as not to offend the weak, and then little by little we listen gladly. I no longer watch a dog chasing a hare when it happens at the circus; but out in the country, if I happen to pass by, that chase may well distract me even from some important thought and turn me toward it—not forcing me to turn my mount aside, but turning the inclination of my heart. And unless you quickly warn me, having already shown me my weakness, either to rise to you from the sight itself by some reflection, or to despise the whole thing and pass on, I grow empty and dull. What about when I am sitting at home and a lizard catching flies, or a spider entangling them as they rush into its webs, often holds my attention? Just because the animals are small, is it not the same thing going on? I go on from there to praise you, the wonderful creator and orderer of all things, but that is not why I began to pay attention. It is one thing to get up quickly, another not to fall. My life is full of such things, and my one hope is your exceedingly great mercy. For when our heart becomes a receptacle for things of this kind and carries crowds of abundant vanity, our prayers too are often interrupted and disturbed by them; and in your presence, while we direct the voice of our heart to your ears, so great a business is cut short by trifling thoughts rushing in from who knows where.

PRIDE AND THE LOVE OF PRAISE

Augustine examines pride and the temptation to love human praise.

10.36.58 Shall we count this too among things to be despised? Or will anything bring us back to hope except your mercy, which we know, since you have begun to change us? And you know how far you have changed me: you who first heal me of the lust to vindicate myself, so that you may be gracious to all my other

iniquities too, and heal all my diseases, and redeem my life from corruption, and crown me with compassion and mercy, and satisfy my desire with good things; you who crushed my pride by fear of you and tamed my neck to your yoke. And now I carry it, and it is light to me, because so you promised and so you have done; and truly it was so, and I did not know it, when I was afraid to take it on.[34]

10.36.59 But, Lord—you who alone rule without pride, because you alone are the true Lord, who have no lord over you—has this third kind of temptation also left me, or can it ever leave me in this whole life: the wish to be feared and loved by people, for no other reason than to get from it a joy that is no joy? It is a wretched life and an ugly boastfulness. From this, above all, comes failing to love you and to fear you chastely; and so you "resist the proud but give grace to the humble," and you thunder over the ambitions of the world, and the foundations of the mountains tremble. So, because certain duties of human society make it necessary for us to be loved and feared by people, the adversary of our true happiness presses on us, scattering everywhere among his snares his "Well done![35] Well done!"—so that while we greedily gather them up we are caught off guard, and withdraw our joy from the truth and place it in human deceit, and come to like being loved and feared not for your sake but in your place. In this way he would have us made like himself and with himself—not in the harmony of love but in the fellowship of punishment: he who resolved to set his throne in the north, so that dark and cold beings might serve him as he imitated you in a perverse and twisted way. But we, Lord, look—we are your little flock; take possession of us. Stretch out your wings, and let us flee under them. Be our glory; let us be loved for your sake, and be feared for your sake. Whoever wants to be praised by people when you blame him will not be defended by people when you judge, nor rescued when you condemn.[36] But when it

34 Echoes Psalm 103:3–5 and Matthew 11:30.
35 The third of the three cravings, the ambition of the world.
36 The throne in the north echoes Isaiah 14:13; the little flock, Luke 12:32.

is not the sinner who is praised in the desires of his soul, nor the one who does wrong who is blessed, but a person is praised for some gift you have given him, and he rejoices more at being praised himself than at having the gift for which he is praised, then he too is praised while you blame him; and the one who praised is now better than the one who was praised. For the one was pleased by God's gift in a human being; the other was more pleased by the gift of a human being than by the gift of God.[37]

10.37.60 We are tempted by these temptations every day, Lord; we are tempted without ceasing. Our daily furnace is the human tongue. In this area too you command self-control of us. Give what you command, and command what you will. You know the groaning of my heart to you over this, and the rivers of my eyes. For I do not easily work out how far I am cleansed of this plague, and I greatly fear my hidden faults, which your eyes know but mine do not. In the other kinds of temptation I have at least some means of examining myself; in this one, almost none. For with the pleasures of the flesh and with the superfluous curiosity for knowing, I can see how far I have gained the power to restrain my mind when I do without those things, whether by choice or because they are absent. Then I ask myself how much more or less it bothers me not to have them.[38] As for riches, which are sought in order to serve one of these three cravings, or two of them, or all three: if the mind cannot tell whether it despises them while it has them, they can be let go, so that it may test itself. But to do without praise and test in this what we are capable of, must we live badly—so depraved and monstrous a life that no one knows us without detesting us? What greater madness could be spoken or thought? But if praise both usually is and ought to be the companion of a good life and good works, we should no more abandon its companionship than the good life itself. And yet I cannot tell whether I can do without something calmly or only with distress, except when it is absent.

10.37.61 What, then, do I confess to you, Lord, in this kind of temptation? What but that I am delighted by praise? Yet more by

37 Echoes Psalm 10:3.

the truth itself than by praise. For if I were offered the choice whether I would rather be praised by everyone while mad or mistaken about everything, or be blamed by everyone while steadfast and utterly certain in the truth, I see which I would choose. Yet I would wish that the approval of another's mouth did not even increase my joy in any good of mine. But it does increase it, I admit—and not only that: blame diminishes it. And when I am troubled by this misery of mine, an excuse slips in on me; what sort it is, you know, God, for it leaves me uncertain. For since you have commanded of us not only self-control—that is, from what things to hold back our love—but also justice—that is, where to direct it—and have willed that not only you but also our neighbor be loved by us, I often seem to myself to take delight in my neighbor's progress or promise when I delight in the praise of someone who understands well; and again, to be saddened by his fault when I hear him criticize what he does not understand or what is good. For I am sometimes saddened even by my own praises, when things are praised in me that I myself dislike, or when even lesser and slight goods are valued more than they deserve. But again, how do I know whether I am affected this way because I do not want the one who praises me to disagree with me about myself—not because I am moved by concern for his good, but because the same goods that please me in myself are more delightful to me when they please someone else too? In a way, it is not I who am praised when my own judgment of myself is not praised, since either things that displease me are praised, or things that please me less are praised more. Am I, then, uncertain of myself on this point?

10.37.62 Look: in you, Truth, I see that I ought to be moved by my praises not for my own sake but for my neighbor's good. Whether I am so, I do not know. In this matter I know myself less than I know you. I beg you, my God, show me to myself as well, so that I may confess to my brothers, who will pray for me, whatever wound I find in myself. Let me question myself again, more carefully. If it is my neighbor's good that moves me when I

38 "Give what you command..." repeats Augustine's prayer from 10.29.40.

am praised, why am I less moved when someone else is unjustly blamed than when I am? Why am I stung more by an insult hurled at me than by one hurled with the same injustice at someone else in my presence? Do I not know this either? Or does it remain that I deceive myself and do not practice the truth before you in my heart and on my tongue? Put this madness far from me, Lord, so that my own mouth may not be "the sinner's oil to anoint my head."[39]

10.38.63 I am needy and poor, and I am better when, in secret groaning, I am displeased with myself and seek your mercy, until what is lacking in me is restored and made complete, into the peace the eye of the arrogant does not know. But words coming from the mouth, and deeds that become known to people, carry a most dangerous temptation from the love of praise, which collects begged votes of approval for a kind of private eminence. It tempts me even when I rebuke it in myself, by the very fact that I rebuke it; and often a person glories more vainly in his very contempt of vainglory—and so he no longer glories in contempt of glory, for he does not despise it while he glories.

10.39.64 Within, too, within there is another evil in the same kind of temptation, by which those who are pleased with themselves become empty, even though they do not please others, or even displease them, and do not try to please them. But those who please themselves greatly displease you—not only when they are pleased with things that are not good as if they were good, but also with your good things as if they were their own; or even as yours, but as if earned by their own merits; or even as coming from your grace, yet not rejoicing in it together with others but begrudging it to them. In all these and similar dangers and toils you see the trembling of my heart; and I feel that my wounds are healed by you again and again, rather than that they are not inflicted on me.

10.40.65 Where have you not walked with me, Truth, teaching me what to beware of and what to seek, when I brought to you what I could see here below and consulted you? I surveyed the world

39 Psalm 141:5 (in the Old Latin version).

outside with my senses as best I could, and I observed the life my body has from me, and my senses themselves. From there I entered the recesses of my memory, those manifold and spacious chambers, wonderfully full of countless riches; and I considered and was awestruck, and I could discern none of these things without you, and I found that none of them was you. Nor was I myself you, I the discoverer, who went through them all and tried to distinguish them and to value each according to its worth—receiving some things from the wavering senses and questioning them, feeling other things mingled with myself, distinguishing and counting the messengers themselves, and in the broad wealth of memory handling some things, storing some away, digging some out. Not I myself, as I did these things—that is, the power by which I did them—not even that was you. For you are the abiding light that I consulted about all these things—whether they existed, what they were, what they were worth—and I heard you teaching and commanding. And I often do this. It delights me, and whenever I can get release from necessary business, I take refuge in this pleasure. Yet in all these things that I run through as I consult you, I find no safe place for my soul except in you, where my scattered pieces may be gathered and nothing of me may depart from you. And sometimes you admit me inwardly into a feeling quite unusual, into a sweetness I cannot describe; if it were brought to completion in me, it would be something—I do not know what—that this life will not be. But I fall back into these things under wretched weights, and I am swallowed up again by the usual things and held fast; and I weep much, but I am held fast much. That is the price the burden of habit exacts! Here I am able to be, but do not want to; there I want to be, but am not able—wretched either way.

10.41.66 And so I have considered the sicknesses of my sins under the threefold craving, and I have called on your right hand to save me. For I saw your splendor with a wounded heart, and, beaten back, I said, "Who can reach that?" I am cast away from the sight of your eyes. You are the Truth presiding over all things; but I, in my greed, did not want to lose you, yet wanted

to possess a lie along with you—just as no one wants to speak falsely in such a way that he himself does not know what is true. So I lost you, because you do not consent to be possessed together with a lie.

THE TRUE MEDIATOR

Augustine rejects false mediators and finds reconciliation with God only in Christ.

10.42.67 Whom could I find to reconcile me to you? Was I to go canvassing the angels? With what prayer? With what rites? Many who tried to return to you and could not do it by themselves have, I hear, attempted this, and fell into a desire for curious visions, and were thought fit to be deluded. For in their exaltation they sought you, puffing out their chests with the arrogance of learning rather than beating them; and through the likeness of their hearts they drew to themselves the powers of this air, conspirators and partners in their pride, by whom they were deceived through magical powers. They were seeking a mediator through whom they might be purified, and there was none. For it was the devil, transforming himself into an angel of light; and he greatly enticed proud flesh, because he himself had no fleshly body. For they were mortal and sinners, while you, Lord, to whom they wanted to be reconciled, are immortal and without sin.[40] A mediator between God and human beings had to have something like God and something like human beings; otherwise, being like humans in both respects, he would be far from God, or being like God in both respects, he would be far from humans, and so would not be a mediator. So that deceitful mediator, by whom, through your secret judgments, pride deserves to be entangled, has one thing in common with humans—namely sin—and wants to seem to have the other in common with God: since he is not clothed in the mortality of the flesh, he parades himself as immortal. But since "the wages of

40 Augustine has in mind the theurgy of the Neoplatonists, rites meant to purify the soul through spiritual powers. The angel of light echoes 2 Corinthians 11:14.

sin is death," he has this in common with humans, for which he is condemned to death along with them.[41]

10.43.68 But the true Mediator, whom in your secret mercy you showed to humankind and sent, so that by his example they might learn humility itself—that "mediator between God and humans, the man Christ Jesus"—appeared between mortal sinners and the immortal Righteous One: mortal with humans, righteous with God. He appeared so that, since the wages of righteousness are life and peace, through a righteousness joined to God he might make void the death of the ungodly whom he makes righteous, a death he chose to share with them. He was shown to the saints of old, so that they might be saved through faith in his passion to come, as we are through faith in his passion past. For insofar as he is man, he is mediator; but insofar as he is the Word, he is not in the middle, because he is equal to God, and God with God, and together one God.

10.43.69 How you have loved us, good Father, who "did not spare your only Son but handed him over" for us, the ungodly! How you have loved us, for whom he, "not thinking it robbery to be equal" to you, "became subject even to death on a cross"—he alone free among the dead, having power to lay down his life and power to take it up again; for us, before you, both victor and victim, and victor because victim; for us, before you, both priest and sacrifice, and priest because sacrifice; making us your children instead of slaves, by being born of you and serving you. Rightly is my hope strong in him, that you will heal all my diseases through him who sits at your right hand and intercedes with you for us; otherwise I would despair.[42] For those diseases are many and great—many and great indeed—but your medicine is greater. We might have thought that your Word was far removed from any union with humanity, and despaired of ourselves, had he not "become flesh and dwelt among us."

10.43.70 Terrified by my sins and by the weight of my misery, I had turned it over in my heart and considered fleeing into

41 Romans 6:23.
42 Philippians 2:6–8; the rest echoes John 10:18.

solitude; but you forbade me and strengthened me, saying: "Christ died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for all." See, Lord, I cast my care on you, that I may live, and "I will consider the wonders of your law." You know my ignorance and my weakness: teach me and heal me. That only Son of yours, "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," has redeemed me with his blood. Let the proud not slander me, for I think on the price paid for me; I eat and drink it and give it out to others; and, poor as I am, I long to be filled with it among those who "eat and are filled. And those who seek him will praise the Lord."[43]

43 2 Corinthians 5:15; Psalm 119:18; Colossians 2:3.

Book XI

Time

Reading the first words of Genesis, Augustine asks what time is and how we measure it.

OPENING THE SCRIPTURES

Augustine asks God to help him understand Scripture, beginning with "In the beginning God created."

11.1.1 Lord, since eternity is yours, can you be unaware of what I am telling you, or see in time what happens in time? Why, then, do I set before you such a string of stories? Certainly not so that you may learn them from me; rather, I am stirring up my affection toward you, and that of those who read these things, so that we may all say, "Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised." I have said it already and I will say it again: "I do this for love of your love." For we pray too, and yet the Truth says, "Your Father knows what you need before you ask him." So we lay bare our affection to you by confessing to you our miseries and your mercies upon us, so that you may free us completely, since you have begun, and we may cease to be miserable in ourselves and be made happy in you. For you have called us to be poor in spirit, and meek, and mourning, and hungry and thirsty for righteousness, and merciful, and pure in heart, and peacemakers.[1] See, I have told you many things, as many as I could and wanted to, because you first willed that I should confess to you, the Lord my God, "for you are good, for your mercy endures forever."

1 Psalm 96:4 (also the opening words of 1.1.1); Matthew 6:8; the list is the Beatitudes, Matthew 5:3–9.

11.2.2 But when am I equal to telling, with the tongue of my pen, all your encouragements and all your terrors, your consolations and your guidance, by which you led me to preach your word and dispense your sacrament to your people? And even if I am equal to telling these things in order, the drops of time are precious to me. For a long time I have been burning to meditate on your law, and in it to confess to you my knowledge and my ignorance, the first glimmers of your illumination and the remnants of my darkness, until weakness is swallowed up by strength. And I do not want the hours I find free from the need to restore the body and the mind's attention, and from the service we owe to others—and the service we do not owe and yet render—to trickle away into anything else.

11.2.3 Lord my God, attend to my prayer, and let your mercy hear my desire, for it does not burn for me alone but wants to be of use to brotherly love; and you see in my heart that this is so. Let me offer you in sacrifice the service of my thought and my tongue, and give me what I may offer you. For I am needy and poor; you are rich to all who call on you, you who, free of care, take care of us. Circumcise my lips, inner and outer, from all rashness and all falsehood. Let your Scriptures be my chaste delight; let me not be deceived in them, nor deceive others from them. Lord, attend and have mercy, Lord my God, light of the blind and strength of the weak, and at once light of those who see and strength of the strong: attend to my soul, and hear it crying out of the deep. For unless your ears are present even in the deep, where shall we go? To whom shall we cry? Yours is the day and yours the night; at your nod the moments fly past. Grant from them some room for our meditations on the hidden things of your law, and do not close it to those who knock. For not in vain did you will so many pages of dark secrets to be written; nor are those forests without their deer, which retreat into them and recover, roam and graze, lie down and chew the cud. O Lord, perfect me and reveal them to me. See, your voice is my joy, your voice above an abundance of pleasures. Give what I love: for I do love, and this too you have given. Do not forsake

your gifts, nor scorn your grass that thirsts. Let me confess to you whatever I find in your books, and "hear the voice of praise," and drink you in, and consider the wonders of your law, from the very beginning in which you made heaven and earth, to the everlasting kingdom of your holy city with you.[2]

11.2.4 Lord, have mercy on me and hear my desire. For I think it does not spring from the earth—not from gold and silver and precious stones, or fine clothes, or honors and powers, or pleasures of the flesh, nor from the necessities of the body and of this life of our pilgrimage—all of which are added to us as we seek your kingdom and your righteousness. See, my God, where my desire comes from. The unjust have told me of delights, but not like your law, Lord: see, that is where my desire comes from. See, Father—look and see and approve; and may it please you, in the sight of your mercy, that I find grace before you, so that the inner meaning of your words may be opened to me when I knock.[3] I beg you through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, the man of your right hand, the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself as your mediator and ours; through whom you sought us when we were not seeking you, and sought us so that we would seek you; your Word, through whom you made all things (and me among them); your only Son, through whom you called to adoption a people of believers (and me among them)—through him, who sits at your right hand and intercedes with you for us, I beg you. In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; it is these I seek in your books. Moses wrote of him; he himself says this; the Truth says this.[4]

11.3.5 Let me hear and understand how "in the beginning you made heaven and earth." Moses wrote this; he wrote it and went away; he passed from here, from you to you, and he is not before me now. If he were, I would take hold of him and ask him and beg him, through you, to open these things to me; and I would lend the ears of my body to the sounds bursting from his mouth.

2 Psalm 26:7.
3 Echoes Matthew 6:33 and Psalm 119:85 (in the Old Latin version).
4 Echoes Psalm 80:17 and John 5:46.

If he spoke in Hebrew, it would strike my senses in vain, and none of it would touch my mind; but if in Latin, I would know what he was saying. But how would I know whether he was telling the truth? And even if I knew this, would I know it from him? Surely within me, within, in the dwelling place of my thought, the Truth—neither Hebrew nor Greek nor Latin nor barbarian—would say, without the organs of mouth and tongue, without the clatter of syllables, "He speaks the truth"; and at once, made certain, I would say confidently to that man of yours, "You speak the truth." Since, then, I cannot question him, I ask you, Truth, by whom he was filled when he spoke true things—I ask you, my God: forgive my sins, and as you granted that servant of yours to say these things, grant me also to understand them.

11.4.6 Look—heaven and earth exist! They cry out that they were made, for they change and vary. But whatever was not made and yet exists has nothing in it that was not there before; and that is what changing and varying is. They also cry out that they did not make themselves: "We exist because we were made. So we did not exist before we existed, so as to be able to make ourselves." And the voice in which they speak is their very self-evidence. You, then, Lord, made them: you who are beautiful, for they are beautiful; you who are good, for they are good; you who are, for they are. Yet they are not beautiful, nor good, nor do they exist, in the way that you, their maker, are; compared with you they are neither beautiful nor good, nor do they exist. We know this—thanks be to you—and our knowledge, compared with your knowledge, is ignorance.

11.5.7 But how did you make heaven and earth? What was the machinery of so vast a work of yours? For you did not work like a human craftsman, who forms one body out of another at the discretion of a mind able to impose, in one way or another, a form it sees within itself with an inner eye (and where would it get that ability, if you had not made it?). And it imposes that form on something that already exists and has being, such as earth or stone or wood or gold or anything of that kind. And

where would these come from, if you had not established them? You made the craftsman's body; you made the soul that commands his limbs; you made the material from which he makes something; you made the talent by which he grasps his art and sees within what he is to make without; you made the bodily sense through which, as through an interpreter, he transfers from mind to material what he is making, and reports back to the mind what has been made, so that the mind within may consult the truth that presides over it as to whether it has been made well. All these things praise you, the creator of all. But how do you make them? How, God, did you make heaven and earth? Certainly it was not in heaven or on earth that you made heaven and earth, nor in the air or in the waters, since these too belong to heaven and earth; nor did you make the whole world in the whole world, because there was nowhere for it to be made before it was made, so as to exist. Nor did you hold anything in your hand from which to make heaven and earth: for where would you have gotten something you had not made, from which to make something? For what exists, except because you exist? So you spoke, and they were made, and in your Word you made them.[5]

11.6.8 But how did you speak? Was it in the way the voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son"? That voice was uttered and passed away; it began and it ended. The syllables sounded and passed, the second after the first, the third after the second, and so on in order, until the last came after the rest, and silence after the last. From this it is clear and plain that the motion of some created thing produced it, itself temporal, serving your eternal will. And these words of yours, made for a moment, the outer ear reported to the understanding mind, whose inner ear is attuned to your eternal Word. But the mind compared these words, sounding in time, with your Word, eternal in its silence, and said, "It is different, far different; far different it is.[6] These are far beneath me, and they do not exist,

5 Echoes Psalm 33:9.
6 Matthew 17:5.

because they flee and pass away; but the Word of my God abides above me forever." If, then, it was with sounding and passing words that you said that heaven and earth should be made, and so made heaven and earth, there was already a bodily creature before heaven and earth, through whose temporal motions that voice could run its course in time. But there was no body before heaven and earth; or if there was, you had certainly made it without a passing voice, so that from it you could make the passing voice with which to say that heaven and earth should be made. For whatever that thing was from which such a voice could be made, unless it had been made by you, it would not exist at all. So, for a body to be made from which those words could come, by what word was it spoken by you?[7]

11.7.9 And so you call us to understand the Word, God with you who are God, which is spoken eternally, and in which all things are spoken eternally. For it is not that what was being said comes to an end and something else is said, so that everything may be said in turn; rather, all things are said at once and eternally. Otherwise there would already be time and change, and not true eternity or true immortality. This I know, my God, and I give you thanks. I know it, I confess to you, Lord, and whoever is not ungrateful to sure truth knows it with me and blesses you. We know, Lord, we know that insofar as anything is not what it was and is what it was not, to that extent it dies and comes to birth. So nothing of your Word gives way or takes another's place, since it is truly immortal and eternal. And therefore by the Word, coeternal with you, you say at once and eternally all that you say, and whatever you say shall come to be comes to be. You make things in no other way than by saying them; and yet not all the things you make by saying them come to be at once and eternally.

11.8.10 Why is this, I ask, Lord my God? I see it in some fashion, but how to put it into words I do not know—except that everything that begins to be and ceases to be begins and ceases at the moment when, in the eternal reason, it is known that it

7 Echoes Isaiah 40:8.

ought to begin or cease; and in that reason nothing begins and nothing ceases. That reason is your Word, which is also the Beginning, because it also speaks to us. So it says in the gospel, speaking through the flesh; and this sounded outwardly in human ears, so that it might be believed, and sought inwardly, and found in the eternal truth, where the good and only Teacher teaches all his disciples. There I hear your voice, Lord, telling me that the one who speaks to us is the one who teaches us, while one who does not teach us, even if he speaks, does not speak to us. And what teaches us, if not unchanging truth?[8] For even when we are prompted by a changeable creature, we are led to unchanging truth, where we truly learn, as we stand and hear him and rejoice with joy at the bridegroom's voice, giving ourselves back to the one from whom we are. And so he is the Beginning: for if he did not remain while we wandered, there would be nowhere for us to return to. And when we return from error, we return, surely, by knowing; and so that we may know, he teaches us, because he is the Beginning and speaks to us.

11.9.11 In this Beginning, God, you made heaven and earth—in your Word, in your Son, in your power, in your wisdom, in your truth—speaking in a wonderful way and making in a wonderful way. Who will grasp it? Who will tell it? What is that which gleams through to me and strikes my heart without wounding it? I shudder and I burn: I shudder insofar as I am unlike it; I burn insofar as I am like it. It is Wisdom, Wisdom itself, that gleams through to me, parting my clouds; and they cover me again as I fall away from it under the fog and heaped-up load of my punishments. For my strength has been so weakened by want that I cannot bear my own good, until you, Lord, who have been merciful to all my iniquities, also heal all my diseases. For you will also redeem my life from corruption, and crown me with compassion and mercy, and satisfy my desire with good things, since my youth will be renewed like the eagle's. For in hope we have been saved, and we wait patiently for your prom-

8 Augustine reads John 8:25 in his Latin Bible, where Jesus, asked who he is, answers: "The Beginning, who also speak to you."

ises. Let whoever can, hear you speaking within; I will cry out confidently, from your own oracle: "How magnificent are your works, Lord! In wisdom you have made them all." And that Wisdom is the Beginning, and in that Beginning you made heaven and earth.[9]

WHAT WAS GOD DOING BEFORE CREATION?

Augustine answers the question of what God did before creation: there was no before without time.

11.10.12 Look—are they not full of their old selves, those who say to us, "What was God doing before he made heaven and earth? If he was idle," they say, "and was not working at anything, why did he not stay that way forever after, just as he had always refrained from work before? For if some new movement arose in God, and a new will, to establish a creation he had never established before, how is that true eternity, where a will arises that was not there before? For God's will is not a creature; it comes before creation, since nothing would be created unless the Creator's will came first. So his will belongs to God's very substance. And if something arose in God's substance that was not there before, that substance is not truly called eternal. But if God's will that creation should exist was eternal, why is creation not eternal too?"

11.11.13 Those who say these things do not yet understand you, O Wisdom of God, light of minds; they do not yet understand how the things that come to be through you and in you come to be. They try to grasp eternal things, but their heart still flutters among the past and future movements of things, and is still empty. Who will hold that heart and fix it, so that it may stand still for a little while, and for a little while catch the splendor of eternity, which always stands still, and compare it with times that never stand still, and see that there is no comparison? Who will make it see that a long time is made long only out of many movements passing by, which cannot be extended all at once;

9 Psalm 104:24; the lines before also echo Romans 8:24–25.

that in the eternal nothing passes away, but the whole is present, whereas no time is wholly present; that all the past is pushed away by the future, and all the future follows on from the past, and all past and future are created by, and flow out from, that which is always present? Who will hold the human heart, so that it may stand still and see how eternity, standing still, neither future nor past, dictates times future and past? Is my hand strong enough for this, or can the hand of my mouth accomplish so great a thing with words?

11.12.14 See, I answer the one who asks, "What was God doing before he made heaven and earth?" I do not give the answer someone is said to have given, dodging the force of the question with a joke: "He was preparing hells," he said, "for people who pry into deep matters." Seeing is one thing, sneering another. That is not my answer. I would more gladly answer "I do not know" about what I do not know than give an answer that mocks the one who asked about deep things and wins praise for the one who answered falsely. Instead I say that you, our God, are the creator of every creature; and if every creature is understood by the words "heaven and earth," I say boldly: "Before God made heaven and earth, he was not making anything." For if he was making something, what was he making but a creature? And I wish I knew everything it would profit me to know as surely as I know that no creature was being made before any creature was made.

11.13.15 But if someone's flighty mind wanders among images of times gone by, and marvels that you, God almighty, all-creating and all-sustaining, maker of heaven and earth, refrained from so great a work through countless ages before you made it, let him wake up and pay attention, for what he marvels at is false. For how could countless ages have passed that you had not made, since you are the author and founder of all ages? Or what times could there have been that were not founded by you? Or how could they have passed, if they had never been? Since, then, you are the maker of all times, if there was any time before you made heaven and earth, why is it said that you were refrain-

ing from work? For you had made that very time, and times could not pass before you made times. But if there was no time before heaven and earth, why do people ask what you were doing then? For there was no "then" where there was no time.

11.13.16 Nor do you precede times in time; otherwise you would not precede all times. You precede all past times in the loftiness of an eternity that is always present, and you surpass all future times, because they are future, and when they have come, they will be past. But you are the same, and your years will not fail. Your years neither go nor come; ours go and come, so that all of them may come. Your years all stand at once, because they stand still; those that go are not pushed out by those that come, because they do not pass away. But these years of ours will all be only when all of them are no more. Your years are one day, and your day is not "every day" but "today," because your today does not give way to tomorrow; nor does it follow yesterday. Your today is eternity. That is why you begot one coeternal with you, to whom you said, "Today I have begotten you." You made all times and you are before all times, and there was no time at which there was no time.[10]

WHAT IS TIME?

Augustine asks what time is and how past and future can exist or be long.

11.14.17 So there was no time at which you had not made anything, because you had made time itself. And no times are coeternal with you, because you remain; if they remained, they would not be times. What, after all, is time? Who could explain it easily and briefly? Who could grasp it even in thought, so as to put it into words? Yet what do we mention in conversation more familiarly and knowingly than time? And we certainly understand when we speak of it; we understand, too, when we hear someone else speak of it. What then is time? If no one asks me, I know; if I want to explain it to someone who asks, I do not know. Yet I say

10 Psalm 2:7.

with confidence that I know this: if nothing passed away, there would be no past time; if nothing were coming, there would be no future time; and if nothing existed, there would be no present time. Those two times, then, past and future—how do they exist, when the past no longer exists and the future does not yet exist? And if the present were always present and never passed into the past, it would no longer be time but eternity. If, then, the present, in order to be time, comes to be only because it passes into the past, how can we say that even the present exists, when the reason it exists is that it will not exist? So that, in fact, we cannot truly say that time exists, except in that it tends toward not existing.

11.15.18 And yet we speak of a long time and a short time, and we say this only of the past or the future. For example, we call a hundred years ago a long time past, and likewise a hundred years from now a long time to come; a short past, say, when we speak of ten days ago, and a short future when we speak of ten days from now. But how can something be long or short that does not exist? For the past no longer exists and the future does not yet exist. So let us not say "It is long," but say of the past "It was long," and of the future "It will be long." My Lord, my light, will your truth not laugh at human beings here too? For the past time that was long—was it long when it was already past, or while it was still present? It could be long only when it existed, so as to be something long; but once past it no longer existed, and so it could not be long, since it did not exist at all. So let us not say, "The past time was long"; for we will find nothing that was long, since from the moment it became past it does not exist. Let us say instead, "That present time was long," because when it was present it was long. It had not yet passed away so as not to exist, and so it was something that could be long; but after it passed, it ceased to be long at the same moment that it ceased to be.

11.15.19 Let us see, then, human soul, whether present time can be long; for it has been given to you to perceive and measure spans of time. What will you answer me? Is a hundred present

years a long time? First see whether a hundred years can be present. If the first of them is going on, that year is present, but the other ninety-nine are future and so do not yet exist. If the second year is going on, one is already past, another present, the rest future. And so with any year in the middle of this hundred that we take as present: before it will be past years, after it future ones. So a hundred years cannot be present. See at least whether the one year that is going on is itself present. If its first month is going on, the rest are future; if the second, the first has already passed and the rest do not yet exist. So not even the year that is going on is wholly present; and if it is not wholly present, it is not a year that is present. For a year is twelve months, of which whichever one is going on is present, and the others are past or future. And yet not even the month that is going on is present, but only one day. If it is the first, the rest are future; if the last, the rest are past; if any of those in between, it stands between past and future days.

11.15.20 See: present time, which alone we found might be called long, has shrunk to the span of barely a single day. But let us examine that too, for not even one day is wholly present. It is made up of twenty-four hours of night and day; the first of these has the rest in the future, the last has them in the past, and any of those in between has past hours before it and future ones after it. And that one hour itself goes by in fleeting particles: whatever of it has flown away is past, whatever remains of it is future. If we can conceive of any bit of time that cannot be divided into even the tiniest parts of moments, that alone is what may be called present; and yet it flies so swiftly from future into past that it is not extended by the slightest delay. For if it is extended, it is divided into past and future; but the present has no extent. Where, then, is the time that we may call long? Is it the future? We do not say of it, "It is long," since what might be long does not yet exist; we say, "It will be long." So when will it be long? If even then it is still future, it will not be long, because what might be long will not yet exist. But if it is to be long at the point when, out of the future that does not yet

exist, it has begun to exist and has become present, so that there can be something that is long—then present time cries out, in the words we used above, that it cannot be long.

11.16.21 And yet, Lord, we perceive intervals of time, and compare them with one another, and call some longer and others shorter. We even measure how much longer or shorter one time is than another, and we answer that this one is double or triple, and that one single, or that this one is just as long as that. But it is times as they pass that we measure, when we measure them by perceiving them. As for past times, which no longer exist, or future ones, which do not yet exist—who can measure them? Unless perhaps someone will dare to say that what does not exist can be measured. So while time is passing, it can be perceived and measured; but once it has passed, since it does not exist, it cannot.

11.17.22 I am inquiring, Father, not asserting. My God, guard me and guide me. Who is there to tell me that there are not three times—past, present, and future—as we learned as children and have taught children, but only the present, since those other two do not exist? Or do they exist too, but time comes out of some hidden place when it turns from future into present, and withdraws into some hidden place when it turns from present into past? For where did those who sang of the future see it, if it does not yet exist? What does not exist cannot be seen. And those who tell of the past would surely not be telling the truth if they did not see it with the mind; and if the past were nothing, it could not be seen at all. So both future and past things exist.

11.18.23 Let me search further, Lord, my hope; let my attention not be thrown into confusion. For if future and past things exist, I want to know where they are. And if I cannot yet manage that, I do know this: wherever they are, they are not there as future or past, but as present. For if they are future there too, they are not there yet; if they are past there too, they are no longer there. So wherever they are, whatever they are, they exist only as present. Yet when past events are truly told, what is brought out of memory is not the things themselves, which have passed away,

but words formed from their images, which those things, as they passed through the senses, fixed in the mind like footprints. My childhood, for instance, which no longer exists, lies in past time, which no longer exists; but when I recall it and tell of it, I look upon its image in present time, because it is still in my memory. Whether there is a similar explanation for the foretelling of future things—whether images of things that do not yet exist are sensed beforehand as already existing—I confess, my God, I do not know. This much I certainly know: we often plan our future actions in advance, and that planning is present, while the action we are planning does not yet exist, because it is future. When we have set about it and begun to do what we were planning, then that action will exist, because then it will be not future but present.

11.18.24 However this mysterious foreknowledge of the future may work, nothing can be seen except what exists. And what already exists is not future but present. So when future things are said to be seen, it is not the things themselves that are seen, which do not yet exist—that is, which are future—but perhaps their causes or signs, which already exist. So these are not future but present to those who see them, and from them future things are predicted, as conceived in the mind. These conceptions in turn already exist, and those who predict the future look at them as present within themselves. Let the vast multitude of things offer me an example. I look at the dawn; I announce that the sun will rise. What I look at is present; what I announce is future—not the sun, which already exists, but its rising, which does not yet exist. And yet unless I pictured that rising in my mind, as I do now while I speak of it, I could not predict it. But neither the dawn I see in the sky is the sunrise, though it comes before it, nor is the picture in my mind. These two are seen as present, so that the future sunrise may be foretold. So future things do not yet exist; and if they do not yet exist, they do not exist; and if they do not exist, they cannot be seen at all. But they can be predicted from present things, which already exist and are seen.

11.19.25 You, then, ruler of your creation—what is the way in which you teach souls what is to come? For you taught your prophets. What is that way in which you teach the future, you to whom nothing is future? Or rather, do you teach present things about the future? For what does not exist certainly cannot be taught. That way is far beyond my sight: it is too strong for me. By myself I cannot reach it; but by you I can, when you grant it, sweet light of my hidden eyes.

PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Augustine proposes that past, present and future exist in the mind as memory, attention and expectation.

11.20.26 What is now plain and clear is that neither future nor past things exist, and it is not properly said, "There are three times, past, present, and future." Perhaps it would be properly said, "There are three times: a present of past things, a present of present things, a present of future things." For these three are somehow in the soul, and I do not see them anywhere else: the present of past things is memory; the present of present things is direct sight; the present of future things is expectation. If we are allowed to speak this way, I see three times, and I admit that there are three. Let people even say, "There are three times, past, present, and future," as custom misuses the words—let them say it. See, I do not mind, I do not object, I do not find fault, so long as what is said is understood: that neither what is future exists now, nor what is past. For few are the things we say properly, and many we say improperly; but what we mean is recognized.

11.21.27 I said a little earlier, then, that we measure times as they pass, so that we can say that this span of time is double that single one, or that this is as much as that, and whatever else we can report about the parts of time by measuring. So, as I was saying, we measure times as they pass; and if someone asks me, "How do you know?" I would answer: I know because we measure them, and we cannot measure what does not exist, and past

and future do not exist. But how do we measure present time, when it has no extent? It is measured, then, while it passes; once it has passed, it is not measured, for there will be nothing to measure. But from where, by what way, and to where does it pass while it is being measured? From where, if not from the future? By what way, if not through the present? To where, if not into the past? So: out of what does not yet exist, through what has no extent, into what no longer exists. But what do we measure, if not time in some extent? For when we speak of single and double and triple and equal, or anything else of this kind in time, we are speaking only of extents of time. In what extent, then, do we measure time as it passes? In the future, out of which it passes? But we do not measure what does not yet exist. In the present, through which it passes? But we do not measure what has no extent. In the past, into which it passes? But we do not measure what no longer exists.

11.22.28 My mind is on fire to understand this most tangled riddle. Do not shut them away, Lord my God, good Father—I beg you through Christ—do not shut away from my longing these things, so familiar and so hidden; let it get inside them, and let them grow clear in the light of your mercy, Lord. Whom shall I ask about them? And to whom could I more fruitfully confess my ignorance than to you, who do not find tiresome my studies, burning so fiercely for your Scriptures? Give what I love; for I do love, and this too you have given. Give, Father, you who truly know how to give good gifts to your children; give, since I have undertaken to understand, and there is toil before me until you open it. I beg you through Christ, in the name of him, the Holy of Holies: let no one shout me down. I too have believed, and therefore I speak. This is my hope, for this I live: to contemplate the delight of the Lord.[11] See, you have made my days old, and they pass away, and how, I do not know. And we speak of time and time, times and times: "How long did he take to say this?" "How long did he take to do this?" and "What a long time it is since I saw that!" and "This syllable has double the time of that

11 Echoes Matthew 7:11, Psalm 73:16 and Psalm 27:4.

single short one." We say these things and hear them, and we are understood and we understand. They are perfectly plain and utterly ordinary, and yet they are also deeply hidden, and finding them out is something new.[12]

TIME AND THE MOTION OF THE HEAVENS

Augustine denies that time is simply the motion of the sun, moon and stars.

11.23.29 I heard a learned man say that the movements of the sun, moon, and stars are themselves time, and I did not agree. For why should not the movements of all bodies be time instead? If the lights of heaven stopped and a potter's wheel kept turning, would there be no time by which we could measure its turns and say either that they took equal intervals, or, if it moved sometimes more slowly and sometimes faster, that some turns lasted longer and others less? And while we said this, would we not also be speaking in time? Would there be long syllables in our words and short ones, unless the long had sounded for a longer time and the short for a shorter? God, grant human beings to see in a small thing the notions common to things both small and great. The stars and lights of heaven are there "for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years."[13] So they are; but I would not say that the turning of that little wooden wheel is a day—nor, for that matter, would that learned man say that it is not time.

11.23.30 I want to know the power and nature of time, by which we measure the movements of bodies and say, for example, that this movement lasts twice as long as that one. For here is my question. "Day" refers not only to the sun's stay above the earth, in the sense in which day is one thing and night another, but also to its whole circuit from east back to east, in the sense in which we say, "So many days have passed" (for "so many days" includes their nights, and the stretches of night are not counted

12 Psalm 39:5, in Augustine's Latin version.
13 Genesis 1:14; the Latin word for "seasons" is the same as the word for "times."

separately). Since, then, a day is completed by the movement of the sun and its circuit from east to east, I ask whether the day is the movement itself, or the duration in which it is completed, or both. If it were the first, then it would be a day even if the sun completed that course in a span of time as short as one hour. If the second, then it would not be a day if the time from one sunrise to the next were as short as one hour; the sun would have to go round twenty-four times to complete a day. If both, then it could not be called a day if the sun went round its whole circuit in the span of an hour, nor if the sun stood still while as much time went by as the sun usually takes to complete its whole round from morning to morning. So I will not ask now what it is that is called a day, but what time is—time by which, in measuring the sun's circuit, we would say that it had been completed in half the usual span of time, if it had been completed in as much time as twelve hours take; and comparing the two times, we would call the one single and the other double, even if the sun went round from east to east sometimes in the single time and sometimes in the double. So let no one tell me that the movements of the heavenly bodies are time. For when, at a certain man's prayer, the sun stood still so that he could carry a battle through to victory, the sun stood still, but time went on. That battle was fought and finished in its own span of time, as much as it needed. I see, then, that it is a kind of stretching. But do I see it? Or do I only seem to myself to see it? You will show me, Light, Truth.[14]

11.24.31 Do you command me to agree if someone says that time is the movement of a body? You do not. For I hear that no body moves except in time: you say so. But I do not hear that the movement of a body is itself time: you do not say so. For when a body moves, I measure by time how long it moves, from when it starts to move until it stops. And if I did not see when it began, and it keeps moving so that I do not see when it stops, I cannot measure it, except perhaps from when I begin to watch until I stop. If I watch for a long time, I can only report that it is a long

14 Joshua, at the battle of Gibeon (Joshua 10:12–14).

time, not how long, because when we say "how long," we say it by comparison, as in "this is as long as that," or "this is double that," and anything else of that kind. But if we can mark the places from which and to which the moving body goes—or its parts, if it is turning as on a lathe—we can say how much time the movement of the body, or of its part, took from this place to that. Since, then, the movement of a body is one thing and that by which we measure how long it lasts is another, who does not sense which of these should rather be called time? For if a body moves unevenly, sometimes moving and sometimes standing still, we measure by time not only its movement but also its standing still, and we say, "It stood still as long as it moved," or "It stood still twice or three times as long as it moved," and whatever else our measurement either determines or estimates —"more or less," as people say. So time is not the movement of a body.

11.25.32 And I confess to you, Lord, that I still do not know what time is; and again I confess to you, Lord, that I know I am saying these things in time, and that I have been speaking about time for a long while now, and that this very "long while" is long only by a duration of time. How then do I know this, when I do not know what time is? Or perhaps I do not know how to say what I know? How wretched I am, who do not even know what I do not know! Look, my God: before you, I do not lie. As I speak, so is my heart. You will light my lamp, Lord my God; you will light up my darkness.

THE STRETCHING OF THE MIND

Augustine concludes that we measure time in the mind, which stretches itself out in memory and expectation.

11.26.33 Does my soul not confess to you, in a truthful confession, that I measure times? So it is, Lord my God: I measure, and I do not know what I measure. I measure the movement of a body by time. Do I not likewise measure time itself? Could I measure a body's movement—how long it lasts and how long it takes to get

from here to there—unless I measured the time in which it moves? With what, then, do I measure time itself? Do we measure a longer time by a shorter, as we measure the length of a beam by the length of a cubit? That is how we seem to measure the length of a long syllable by the length of a short one, and to say that it is double. In the same way we measure the length of poems by the length of lines, the length of lines by the length of feet, the length of feet by the length of syllables, and the length of long syllables by that of short ones—not on the page (for that way we measure spaces, not times), but as the words pass by in being spoken. And we say, "It is a long poem, for it is made up of so many lines; the lines are long, for they consist of so many feet; the feet are long, for they stretch over so many syllables; the syllable is long, for it is double a short one." But not even so do we arrive at a fixed measure of time, since a shorter line, if drawn out in speaking, may sound for a longer span of time than a longer one spoken quickly. So with a poem, so with a foot, so with a syllable. From this it seemed to me that time is nothing other than a stretching—but of what, I do not know; and it would be surprising if it were not a stretching of the mind itself. For what, I beg you, my God, do I measure?[15] And I say either indefinitely, "This time is longer than that," or even definitely, "This is double that." That I measure time, I know. But I do not measure the future, because it does not yet exist; I do not measure the present, because it is not stretched over any extent; I do not measure the past, because it no longer exists. What, then, do I measure? Times as they pass, not times that have passed? That is what I had said.

11.27.34 Press on, my mind, and attend with all your strength. God is our helper: he made us, and not we ourselves. Attend where truth begins to dawn. Suppose, for instance, a bodily voice begins to sound, and sounds, and keeps sounding, and then it stops; now there is silence, and that voice is past, and is a voice no longer. It was future before it sounded, and could not

15 Latin distentio, an extending or pulling apart; hence "a stretching of the mind" (distentio animi).

be measured, because it did not yet exist; and now it cannot, because it no longer exists. So it could be measured then, while it was sounding, because then it existed to be measured. But even then it was not standing still: it was going, passing away. Or was that exactly why it could be measured? For in passing, it stretched over some span of time in which it could be measured, since the present has no span. If, then, it could be measured then—suppose another voice has begun to sound and is still sounding, in one continuous tone without any break. Let us measure it while it is sounding.[16] For once it has stopped sounding, it will already be past, and there will be nothing that can be measured. Let us measure it, then, and say how long it is. But it is still sounding, and it cannot be measured except from its beginning, when it started to sound, up to its end, when it stops. For what we measure is precisely the interval from some beginning to some end. So a voice that never ends cannot be measured, so as to say how long or short it is, nor can it be called equal to another, or single or double in relation to another, or anything else. But when it has ended, it will no longer exist. How then will it be possible to measure it? And yet we measure times—not those that do not yet exist, nor those that no longer exist, nor those that are extended by no duration, nor those that have no boundaries. So we measure neither future nor past nor present nor passing times—and yet we measure times.

11.27.35 "Deus creator omnium" [God, creator of all things]: this line of eight syllables alternates short and long syllables. So the four short ones—the first, third, fifth, and seventh—are single in relation to the four long ones—the second, fourth, sixth, and eighth. Each long one has double the time of each short one. I say the line aloud and I report that it is so, as far as it is perceived by plain sense. As far as sense is plain, I measure the long syllable by the short one and perceive that it has twice as much. But when one sounds after the other—if the first is short and the second long—how shall I hold on to the short one, and how shall I lay it against the long one to measure it, so as to find that the

16 Psalm 62:8.

long one has twice as much, since the long one does not begin to sound until the short one has stopped sounding? And do I measure the long one itself while it is present, when I do not measure it until it has ended? Yet its ending is its passing away. What is it, then, that I measure? Where is the short syllable I measure with? Where is the long one I measure? Both have sounded, flown off, passed away; they no longer exist. And yet I measure them, and I answer confidently—as far as a practiced sense can be trusted—that one is single and the other double, in extent of time, that is. And I cannot do this except because they have passed and are finished. So it is not the syllables themselves, which no longer exist, that I measure, but something in my memory that remains fixed there.

11.27.36 It is in you, my mind, that I measure times. Do not interrupt me—that is, do not interrupt yourself with the jostling crowd of your impressions. In you, I say, I measure times. The impression that things make on you as they pass, and that remains when they have passed—that is what I measure, as something present, not the things that passed by to produce it. It is this I measure when I measure times. So either this is what times are, or it is not times that I measure. What about when we measure silences, and say that this silence lasted as long as that sound did? Do we not stretch our thought out to the measure of the sound, as if it were sounding, so that we can report something about the intervals of silence in a span of time? For even when voice and mouth are still, we run through poems and verses and any kind of speech in our thoughts, and any measured movements whatever, and we report on the spans of time—how long this is compared with that—exactly as if we were saying them aloud. Suppose someone wants to utter a rather long sound and has decided beforehand how long it is going to be. He has certainly already gone through that span of time in silence; and, committing it to memory, he begins to utter the sound, which goes on sounding until it is brought to the end he set for it. Or rather, it has sounded and it will sound: for the part of it already completed has sounded, and what remains will sound.

And so it is carried through, while present attention pushes the future over into the past—the past growing as the future shrinks —until, the future used up, the whole is past.

11.28.37 But how is the future, which does not yet exist, diminished or used up? Or how does the past, which no longer exists, grow—unless because in the mind that does this there are three things? For the mind expects, attends, and remembers, so that what it expects passes through what it attends to into what it remembers. Who, then, denies that future things do not yet exist? Yet there is already in the mind an expectation of future things. And who denies that past things no longer exist? Yet there is still in the mind a memory of past things. And who denies that present time has no extension, since it passes in an instant? Yet attention endures, and through it what is about to be present passes on into being absent. So it is not future time that is long, since it does not exist; a long future is a long expectation of the future. Nor is past time long, since it does not exist; a long past is a long memory of the past.

11.28.38 I am about to recite a song I know. Before I begin, my expectation stretches over the whole of it. But once I have begun, as much of it as I pluck off into the past, my memory stretches over that too; and the life of this action of mine is stretched out two ways—into memory, because of what I have said, and into expectation, because of what I am about to say. Yet my attention is present, and through it what was future is carried across to become past. The more this goes on and on, the shorter expectation becomes and the longer memory, until all expectation is used up, when the whole action is finished and has passed into memory. And what happens with the whole song happens also with each of its parts and each of its syllables. The same happens in a longer action, of which that song may be a small part; the same in a person's whole life, whose parts are all that person's actions; the same in the whole age of the children of men, whose parts are all human lives.

GATHERED INTO THE ONE

Augustine contrasts his scattered life in time with God's eternity and asks to be gathered into the One.

11.29.39 But since your mercy is better than lives, see: my life is a stretching. And your right hand has taken me up in my Lord, the Son of Man, the mediator between you, the One, and us, the many—many in many ways and through many things—so that through him I may lay hold of the one by whom I have been laid hold of, and may be gathered up from my old days to follow the One. Forgetting what lies behind, not stretched apart toward things that will come and pass away but stretched forward to what lies ahead, not by stretching apart but by concentration, I press on toward the prize of the call from above, where I may hear the voice of praise and contemplate your delight, which neither comes nor passes away. But now my years are spent in groaning; and you, Lord, my Father, are my comfort; you are eternal.[17] But I have been scattered into times whose order I do not know, and my thoughts, the innermost entrails of my soul, are torn apart by tumultuous changes, until I flow together into you, purified and melted by the fire of your love.

11.30.40 And I will stand and be made firm in you, in my mold, your truth. I will not put up with the questions of people who, from a disease that is its own punishment, thirst for more than they can hold, and ask, "What was God doing before he made heaven and earth?" or "What came into his mind to make something, when he had never made anything before?" Grant them, Lord, to think carefully about what they are saying, and to discover that "never" cannot be said where there is no time. So when he is said never to have made anything, what else is being said but that he made nothing at any time? Let them see, then, that there can be no time without a creature, and let them stop this empty talk. Let them also stretch forward to what lies

17 Augustine plays on distentio ("stretching"), extentus ("stretched forward") and intentio ("concentration"), echoing Philippians 3:12–14.

ahead, and understand that you are before all times, the eternal creator of all times, and that no times are coeternal with you, nor is any creature, even if there is one above times.

11.31.41 Lord my God, what is that deep recess of your high secret, and how far from it have the consequences of my offenses cast me? Heal my eyes, and let me rejoice together in your light. Certainly, if there were a mind so powerful in knowledge and foreknowledge that all things past and future were known to it as well as one very familiar song is known to me, that mind would be exceedingly wonderful, astonishing to the point of awe. For nothing done and nothing still to come in all the ages would be hidden from it—just as, when I sing that song, it is not hidden from me what and how much of it has gone by since the beginning, and what and how much remains until the end. But far be it from you, maker of the universe, maker of souls and bodies—far be it from you to know all things future and past in that way. Far, far more wonderfully do you know them, and far more mysteriously. For it is not with you as it is with someone singing a familiar song or hearing one: his feelings vary and his perception is stretched out by expectation of the sounds to come and memory of those gone by. Nothing like that happens to you, who are unchangeably eternal—that is, the truly eternal creator of minds. So, just as you knew heaven and earth in the beginning without any variation in your knowledge, so you made heaven and earth in the beginning without any distinction in your action. Let whoever understands this confess to you; and let whoever does not understand confess to you. Oh, how high you are—and the humble of heart are your house! For you raise up those who are crushed, and those whose height you are do not fall.

Book XII

Creation: heaven and earth
Augustine interprets "heaven and earth" and defends many true readings of Genesis.

HEAVEN AND EARTH

Augustine begins to ask what "heaven and earth" mean in the first verse of Genesis.

12.1.1 My heart, Lord, is busy with much in this poverty of my life, stirred by the words of your holy Scripture. And so, most of the time, the neediness of human understanding is lavish with words, because seeking talks more than finding, asking takes longer than obtaining, and the hand that knocks works harder than the hand that receives. We hold the promise: who will break it? "If God is for us, who can be against us?" "Ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks will find, and to the one who knocks it will be opened." These are your promises; and who need fear being deceived when Truth makes the promise?[1]

12.2.2 The lowliness of my tongue confesses to your loftiness that you made heaven and earth: this heaven that I see, and this earth I tread on, from which comes this earth that I carry—you made them. But where is the heaven of heaven, Lord, of which we have heard in the words of the psalm, "The heaven of heaven is the Lord's, but the earth he has given to the children of men"? Where is the heaven we do not see, compared with which all

1 Romans 8:31; Matthew 7:7–8.

that we see is earth? For this whole bodily universe, which is not whole in every part, has received a beautiful form even in its lowest parts, and our earth is at its bottom. But compared with that heaven of heaven, even the heaven of our earth is earth. And it is not absurd to call both these great bodies earth, compared with that heaven—whatever it is—which belongs to the Lord and not to the children of men.[2]

FORMLESS MATTER

Augustine interprets the invisible, unformed earth as formless matter created from nothing.

12.3.3 And surely this earth was invisible and unformed, and there was an abyss of some unfathomable depth, over which there was no light, because it had no appearance at all. That is why you commanded it to be written that "darkness was over the abyss." What is that but the absence of light? For where would light have been, if there had been any, except over it, rising above it and lighting it up? So where there was not yet light, what was the presence of darkness but the absence of light? Darkness, then, was over it, because light was absent above it—just as where there is no sound, there is silence. And what is it for silence to be there but for sound not to be there? Did you not, Lord, teach this soul that confesses to you? Did you not, Lord, teach me that before you formed that formless matter and shaped it into distinct things, there was nothing—no color, no shape, no body, no spirit?[3] And yet not absolutely nothing: there was a kind of formlessness without any appearance.

12.4.4 What, then, was it to be called, so that it might somehow be conveyed even to slower minds, if not by some ordinary word? And what can be found in all the parts of the world closer to complete formlessness than earth and abyss? For, in keeping with their lowest rank, they have less beauty than the higher things, which are all shining and full of light. Why, then, should

2 Psalm 115:16.

3 Genesis 1:2, in the Old Latin version Augustine used.

I not take it that the formlessness of matter—which you had made without beauty of form so that from it you might make a beautifully formed world—was conveyed to human beings so aptly that it was called "invisible and unformed earth"?

12.5.5 When thought looks here for something the senses can grasp, it says to itself: "It is not an intelligible form, like life or justice, since it is the matter of bodies; nor is it perceptible to the senses, since in what is invisible and unformed there is nothing to be seen or perceived." While human thought says this to itself, should it try either to know it by not knowing it, or not to know it by knowing it?

12.6.6 As for me, Lord, if I am to confess to you with my mouth and my pen all that you have taught me about this matter: once I heard its name without understanding it, from people who told me about it without understanding it themselves, and I pictured it with countless varied forms—and so I was not picturing it at all. My mind turned over foul and horrible forms in jumbled order, but forms nonetheless; and I called it formless not because it lacked form, but because it had such a form that, if it appeared, my senses would turn away from it as strange and unfitting, and human weakness would be thrown into confusion. But what I was picturing was formless not by the lack of all form but by comparison with more beautiful things. And true reason urged me to strip away completely every last remnant of any form whatsoever, if I wanted to conceive of something wholly formless; and I could not. For I found it easier to suppose that what was deprived of all form did not exist than to conceive of something between form and nothing—neither formed nor nothing, formless and next to nothing. So my mind stopped questioning my spirit on this point, full as it was of images of formed bodies, changing and varying them at will; and I turned my attention to bodies themselves and looked more deeply into their changeableness, by which they cease to be what they had been and begin to be what they were not. And I suspected that this same passage from form to form took place through something formless, not through absolutely nothing. But I wanted to

know, not to suspect. And if my voice and pen were to confess to you everything you have untangled for me on this question, which of my readers would have the patience to take it in? Yet my heart will not on that account cease to give you honor and a song of praise for the things it cannot put into words. For the changeableness of changeable things is itself capable of receiving all the forms into which changeable things are changed. And what is this? Is it mind? Is it body? Is it some form of mind or body? If one could say "a nothing-something" and "an is-that-is-not," that is what I would call it. And yet it already existed in some way, so as to receive these visible and ordered forms.

12.7.7 And where would it have got whatever being it had so as to receive these visible and ordered forms—where would it have got whatever being it had, if not from you, from whom all things are, to whatever extent they are? But the more unlike you a thing is, the further it is from you—not in place. So you, Lord, who are not one thing at one time and another at another, nor one way now and another way then, but the Selfsame, the Selfsame, the Selfsame—"holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty"—in the Beginning, which is from you, in your Wisdom, which was born of your substance, made something, and made it out of nothing. For you made heaven and earth not out of yourself; otherwise it would be equal to your only-begotten Son, and through that equal to you as well. And it would in no way be right for something that was not from you to be equal to you.[4] And there was nothing besides you from which you could make them, God, one Trinity and threefold Unity. And so you made heaven and earth out of nothing—a great thing and a small thing—because you are almighty and good, to make all things good: a great heaven and a small earth. You were, and there was nothing else out of which you made heaven and earth: two things, one close to you, the other close to nothing; one to which you alone would be superior, the other to which nothing would be inferior.

4 Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8. "The Beginning" and "Wisdom" here refer to the Son, the Word through whom God creates.

THE HEAVEN OF HEAVEN

Augustine identifies the "heaven of heaven" as a created intellectual realm beyond time, and defends his reading.

12.8.8 But that heaven of heaven is yours, Lord; whereas the earth, which you gave to the children of men to see and touch, was not such as we now see and touch. For it was invisible and unformed, and it was an abyss over which there was no light; or, darkness was over the abyss—that is, more than in the abyss. For this abyss of waters, now visible, has even in its depths a light proper to its appearance, somehow perceptible to the fish and to the creatures that crawl along its bottom. But that whole thing was close to nothing, because it was still entirely formless; yet it was already something that could be formed. For you, Lord, made the world from formless matter, which you made out of no thing as an almost-nothing, so that from it you might make the great things that we, the children of men, marvel at. For this bodily heaven is truly wonderful—the firmament between water and water—of which, on the second day, after the creation of light, you said, "Let it be," and so it was made. That firmament you called heaven—but the heaven of this earth and sea, which you made on the third day by giving visible appearance to the formless matter you had made before any day. For you had already made a heaven too before any day, but that was the heaven of this heaven, since in the beginning you had made heaven and earth. But the earth itself that you had made was formless matter, because it was invisible and unformed, and darkness was over the abyss.[5] From this invisible and unformed earth, from this formlessness, from this almost-nothing, you were to make all the things of which this changeable world consists—and yet does not stand firm. In it changeableness itself appears, and in changeableness times can be perceived and counted; for times come about through the changes of things, as

5 Genesis 1:6–10.

their forms vary and turn. And the matter of those forms is the invisible earth spoken of above.

12.9.9 And so the Spirit, the teacher of your servant, when he records that you made heaven and earth in the beginning, is silent about times and says nothing about days. For surely the heaven of heaven, which you made in the beginning, is some intellectual creature. Although it is in no way coeternal with you, the Trinity, it nevertheless shares in your eternity. It firmly restrains its own changeableness through the sweetness of its most blessed contemplation of you, and, clinging to you without any lapse from the moment it was made, it rises above all the whirling succession of times. But this formlessness, the invisible and unformed earth, is not itself counted among the days either. For where there is no form and no order, nothing comes and nothing passes away; and where this does not happen, there are certainly no days, and no succession of spans of time.[6]

12.10.10 O Truth, light of my heart, do not let my darkness speak to me! I slid down into these things and was darkened; but even from here, even from here, I loved you dearly. I went astray, and I remembered you. I heard your voice behind me, calling me to come back, and I scarcely heard it for the noise of the restless. And now, look, I am coming back, burning and panting, to your fountain. Let no one stop me: I will drink it, and live it. Let me not be my own life: I lived badly from myself; I was death to myself. In you I come back to life. You speak to me; you converse with me. I have believed your books, and their words are deeply mysterious.

12.11.11 You have already told me, Lord, in a loud voice in my inner ear, that you are eternal, "who alone have immortality," since you are not changed by any form or motion, and your will does not vary with the times; for a will that is now one thing and now another is not immortal. This is clear to me in your sight; let it grow clearer and clearer, I pray, and in that revelation let me remain, sober, under your wings.[7] Again you have told me,

6 The servant is Moses, traditionally regarded as the author of Genesis.
7 1 Timothy 6:16.

Lord, in a loud voice in my inner ear, that all natures and substances which are not what you are, and yet exist, were made by you. (Only this is not from you: what does not exist, and the movement of the will away from you, who are, toward what is less—for such a movement is wrongdoing and sin.) And you told me that no one's sin either harms you or disturbs the order of your rule, whether in the highest or in the lowest. This is clear to me in your sight; let it grow clearer and clearer, I pray, and in that revelation let me remain, sober, under your wings.

12.11.12 Again you have told me in a loud voice in my inner ear that not even that creature is coeternal with you whose delight you alone are. Drinking you in with unwavering chastity, it never and nowhere shows its changeableness; with you always present to it, to whom it holds fast with all its affection, it has no future to wait for and carries nothing over into the past to remember, and so it is altered by no change and stretched out into no times. O blessed creature—if such there is—in clinging to your blessedness, blessed in you, its eternal indweller and illuminator! Nor do I find anything that I would more gladly call "the heaven of heaven, which is the Lord's" than your house, which contemplates your delight without any failing that would make it go out to something else: a pure mind, most harmoniously one in the settled peace of holy spirits, citizens of your city in the heavens above these heavens.

12.11.13 Let the soul whose wandering has taken it far away understand this—if it now thirsts for you, if its tears have now become its bread while every day it is asked, "Where is your God?", if it now asks one thing of you and seeks it: to dwell in your house all the days of its life. And what is its life but you? And what are your days but your eternity, like your years, which do not fail, because you are always the same? From this, then, let the soul that is able understand how far above all times you are eternal, since your house, which has never wandered away, though it is not coeternal with you, yet by clinging to you unceasingly and unfailingly undergoes no succession of times.[8]

8 Psalm 42:3.

This is clear to me in your sight; let it grow clearer and clearer, I pray, and in this revelation let me remain, sober, under your wings.

12.11.14 Look: there is something formless in these changes of the last and weakest things. And who will tell me—unless it is someone who wanders and tumbles about in the emptiness of his own heart with his fantasies—who but such a person will tell me that, if all form were diminished and used up, and only the formlessness remained through which a thing was changed and turned from form to form, it could display the succession of times? That is utterly impossible, because without variety of motions there are no times, and there is no variety where there is no form.

12.12.15 Having considered these things—as far as you grant it, my God, as far as you rouse me to knock and open to me when I knock—I find two things you made that are without times, though neither is coeternal with you. One is so formed that, without any break in contemplation, without any interval of change, changeable yet unchanged, it enjoys your eternity and unchangeableness to the full. The other was so formless that it had no form from which it could change into another form, whether of motion or of rest, so as to be subject to time. But you did not leave this formless; for before any day, in the beginning, you made heaven and earth—these two things I have been speaking of. "But the earth was invisible and unformed, and darkness was over the abyss." By these words formlessness is suggested, so that people who cannot conceive of a complete absence of form that nonetheless does not amount to nothing might be led along step by step. From it were to be made a second heaven, and an earth visible and formed, and beautiful water, and whatever else is recorded as made thereafter in the establishing of this world—not without days, because these things are such that the successions of times take place in them through the ordered changes of motions and forms.

12.13.16 This is my sense for now, my God, when I hear your Scripture saying, "In the beginning God made heaven and earth;

but the earth was invisible and unformed, and darkness was over the abyss," without mentioning on which day you made these things. This is my sense for now, because of that heaven of heaven, the intellectual heaven, where understanding means knowing all at once—not in part, not in a riddle, not through a mirror, but wholly, openly, face to face; not now this and now that, but, as I said, knowing all at once, without any succession of times. And it is because of the invisible and unformed earth, which is also without any succession of times—the succession that usually brings now this and now that; for where there is no form, there is no this and that anywhere.[9] Because of these two—the one formed from the very start, the other utterly formless; the first a heaven, but the heaven of heaven, the second an earth, but an earth invisible and unformed—because of these two, I sense for now, your Scripture says without mentioning days, "In the beginning God made heaven and earth." For it immediately added which earth it meant; and by recording that on the second day the firmament was made and called heaven, it suggests which heaven it had spoken of earlier, without mentioning days.

12.14.17 Wonderful is the depth of your words! See, their surface lies before us, coaxing the little ones; but wonderful is their depth, my God, wonderful their depth! To gaze into it brings a shudder—the shudder of reverence and the trembling of love. I hate its enemies fiercely. Oh, that you would slay them with a two-edged sword, so that they would no longer be its enemies! For this is how I love them: I want them slain to themselves, so that they may live to you. But look, there are others, not critics but admirers of the book of Genesis, who say: "That is not what the Spirit of God, who wrote these things through his servant Moses, meant these words to convey. He did not mean what you say, but something else—what we say." To them, with you as judge, God of us all, I answer as follows.

12.15.18 Will you say that what Truth tells me in a loud voice in my inner ear is false—about the true eternity of the Creator: that

9 Genesis 1:1–2.

his substance in no way varies with times, and that his will is not outside his substance? From this it follows that he does not will now this and now that, but wills once, all at once and always, everything that he wills—not again and again, nor now these things and now those; nor does he will later what he did not will before, or cease to will what he willed before. For such a will is changeable, and nothing changeable is eternal; but our God is eternal. Again, it tells me in my inner ear that the expectation of things to come becomes direct sight when they have come, and that same sight becomes memory when they have passed. Now every act of attention that varies in this way is changeable, and nothing changeable is eternal; but our God is eternal. I gather these truths together and join them, and I find that my God, the eternal God, did not establish creation by some new act of will, and that his knowledge undergoes nothing transitory.

12.15.19 What, then, will you say, you who contradict me? Are these things false? "No," they say. What then? Is it false that every formed nature, or matter capable of form, exists only from him who is supremely good because he supremely is? "We do not deny that either," they say. Then what? Do you deny that there is a certain sublime creature, clinging with such chaste love to the true and truly eternal God that, although it is not coeternal with him, it does not come loose from him or slip away into any variation and succession of times, but rests in the truest contemplation of him alone? For you, God, show yourself to one who loves you as much as you command, and you are enough for it; and so it does not turn away from you, nor toward itself. This is the house of God—not earthly, nor made of any heavenly bodily mass, but spiritual and sharing in your eternity, because it is without stain forever. For you have established it forever and ever; you have laid down a decree, and it will not pass away. Yet it is not coeternal with you, since it is not without beginning: it was made.

12.15.20 For we find no time before it, since "wisdom was created before all things." Yet this is certainly not that Wisdom which is

fully coeternal and equal to you, our God, its Father, through which all things were created, and which is the Beginning in which you made heaven and earth. Rather, it is the wisdom that was created: namely, the intellectual nature, which is light by contemplating light. For it too, although created, is called wisdom. But as great as the difference between the light that illuminates and the light that is illuminated, so great is the difference between the Wisdom that creates and this wisdom that was created—just as between the righteousness that makes righteous and the righteousness that has come about by being made righteous. (For we too are called your righteousness; one of your servants says, "so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.")[10] So a certain wisdom that was created was created before all things: the rational and intellectual mind of your chaste city, our mother, which is above, and is free, and eternal in the heavens. (In which heavens, if not the heavens of heavens that praise you? For this too is "the heaven of heaven is the Lord's.") And even though we find no time before it—since what was created first of all precedes even the creation of time—still, before it is the eternity of the Creator himself, by whom it was made and from whom it took its beginning: not a beginning in time, since time did not yet exist, but the beginning of its own existence.

12.15.21 Hence it is from you, our God, in such a way that it is plainly something other than you, and not the Selfsame. Although we find time not only not before it but not even in it—since it is fit always to see your face and never turns aside from it (which is why it is not altered by any change)—yet changeableness itself is in it, by which it would grow dark and cold, if it did not cling to you with great love and shine and burn from you like a perpetual noon. O house full of light and beauty, I have loved your beauty and the dwelling place of the glory of my Lord, your builder and owner! Let my wandering sigh for you; and I ask the one who made you to possess me too in you, since he made me too. I have gone astray like a lost sheep; but on the

10 Sirach 1:4; 2 Corinthians 5:21 (the servant is Paul).

shoulders of my shepherd, your builder, I hope to be carried back to you.

12.15.22 What do you say to me, you contradictors whom I was addressing, who nevertheless believe that Moses was a devout servant of God and that his books are oracles of the Holy Spirit? Is not this the house of God—not coeternal with God, yet in its own way eternal in the heavens—where you look in vain for the successions of times, because you do not find them? For it transcends every stretching and every whirling span of time, since its good is to cling to God always. "It is," they say. Then which of the things my heart cried out to my God, when it heard within the voice of his praise—which of them, tell me, do you claim is false? Is it that there was formless matter, where, since there was no form, there was no order? But where there was no order, there could be no succession of times; and yet this almost-nothing, insofar as it was not absolutely nothing, certainly came from him from whom comes whatever is, in whatever way it is something. "This too," they say, "we do not deny."

THOSE WHO DISAGREE

Augustine lays out the various interpretations of Genesis held by those who accept its truth.

12.16.23 For it is with these people that I want to talk a little in your presence, my God—those who grant that all these things are true, which your truth does not keep silent within my mind. As for those who deny them, let them bark as much as they like and deafen themselves; I will try to persuade them to be quiet and to open a way for your word to reach them. But if they refuse and push me away, I beg you, my God, do not be silent to me. Speak truly in my heart; for you alone speak so. And I will leave them outside, blowing into the dust and kicking earth up into their own eyes, and I will enter my chamber and sing you love songs, groaning with groans that cannot be spoken in my wandering, and remembering Jerusalem with my heart stretched up toward it—Jerusalem my homeland, Jerusalem my mother—and you

who reign over it: its illuminator, father, guardian, husband, its chaste and strong delights and solid joy and all good things beyond words, all at once, because you are the one supreme and true good. And I will not turn away until you gather all that I am from this scattering and deformity into the peace of that dearest mother, where the first fruits of my spirit are, and from which these things are certain to me; and until you conform and confirm me forever, my God, my mercy. But with those who do not call false all these things that are true, who honor your holy Scripture, published by holy Moses, and set it with us at the summit of authority to be followed, and who yet contradict us on some point, I speak as follows. Be judge, our God, between my confessions and their contradictions.

12.17.24 For they say: "Even if these things are true, Moses was not thinking of these two things when, by the Spirit's revelation, he said, 'In the beginning God made heaven and earth.' By the name 'heaven' he did not mean that spiritual or intellectual creature that always contemplates the face of God, nor by the name 'earth' formless matter." What then? "What we say," they reply, "is what that man meant; that is what he expressed in those words." What is that? "By the name 'heaven and earth,'" they say, "he wanted first to signify this whole visible world, universally and briefly, so as afterward, by counting out the days, to set out one by one, as it were, everything that it pleased the Holy Spirit to declare in this way. For the people he was speaking to were so rough and carnal that he judged only the visible works of God should be commended to them." But they agree that the invisible and unformed earth and the dark abyss —from which, as is then shown, all these visible things known to everyone were made and set in order during those days—may, not unfittingly, be understood as this formless matter.

12.17.25 What if someone else were to say that this same formlessness and confusion of matter was first suggested by the name "heaven and earth," because from it this visible world, with all the natures that plainly appear in it—a world often called "heaven and earth"—was established and completed?

What if yet another were to say that invisible and visible nature is not unfittingly called "heaven and earth," and that therefore the whole creation which God made in Wisdom—that is, in the Beginning—is comprised in these two words? But since all things were made not from the very substance of God but out of nothing—because they are not the Selfsame that God is, and there is a certain changeableness in all of them, whether they remain, like the eternal house of God, or change, like the human soul and body—he might say that the common matter of all things invisible and visible, still formless but certainly capable of form, from which heaven and earth were to be made (that is, invisible and visible creation, both now formed), was expressed by the words that call it "the invisible and unformed earth" and "darkness over the abyss." And he might draw this distinction: that "the invisible and unformed earth" is to be understood as bodily matter before it had the quality of form, and "darkness over the abyss" as spiritual matter before its almost fluid excess was restrained, and before it was illuminated by wisdom.

12.17.26 There is still another view that someone else might put forward, if he wished: that when we read, "In the beginning God made heaven and earth," the words heaven and earth do not mean natures, invisible and visible, already complete and formed. Rather, these names designate the still formless beginning of things, matter capable of being formed and created. For in it, jumbled together and not yet distinguished by qualities and forms, were already the things that now, set out in their proper order, are called heaven and earth—the one a spiritual, the other a bodily creation.

MANY TRUE MEANINGS

Augustine argues that Scripture may hold many true meanings, and disputes over them should yield to love.

12.18.27 Having heard and weighed all these views, I do not want to fight about words; that is of no use except to ruin those who listen. But the law is good for building up, if one uses it lawfully,

because its goal is love from a pure heart, a good conscience and sincere faith. And our Master knows on which two commandments he hung the whole law and the prophets. Since I confess these things so ardently, my God, light of my eyes in secret, what harm is it to me if these words can be understood in different ways, so long as the meanings are true? What harm is it to me, I say, if I take the writer to have meant something other than what someone else takes him to have meant?[11] All of us who read are straining to track down and grasp what the author we are reading meant; and since we believe him truthful, we do not dare suppose he said anything we know or think to be false. So while each of us tries to find in the holy Scriptures what the writer meant there, what harm is there if someone takes a meaning that you, light of all truthful minds, show to be true—even if the author he is reading did not mean it, since that author too meant something true, though not this?

12.19.28 For it is true, Lord, that you made heaven and earth. And it is true that the Beginning is your wisdom, in which you made all things. It is true, too, that this visible world has heaven and earth as its great parts—a brief summing-up of all the natures that have been made and established. And it is true that everything changeable suggests to our understanding a certain formlessness, by which it takes on form or by which it is changed and turned. It is true that what clings so closely to the unchangeable form that, though changeable, it does not change, is subject to no passage of time. It is true that formlessness, which is next to nothing, cannot undergo the successions of time. It is true that the thing from which something is made can, by a certain manner of speaking, already bear the name of what is made from it; so whatever formlessness heaven and earth were made from could be called heaven and earth. It is true that of all formed things none is nearer to the formless than earth and the abyss. It is true that you, from whom all things are, made not only what is created and formed but also whatever is

11 Echoing 2 Timothy 2:14, 1 Timothy 1:5–8 and Matthew 22:40.

capable of being created and formed. It is true that everything formed out of the formless is first formless and then formed.

12.20.29 From all these truths—which are not doubted by those to whom you have granted an inner eye to see such things, and who firmly believe that Moses your servant spoke in the spirit of truth—from all these, then, one person takes one meaning, saying: "In the beginning God made heaven and earth" means that in his Word, coeternal with himself, God made the intelligible and the sensible creation, or the spiritual and the bodily. Another takes another, saying: "In the beginning God made heaven and earth" means that in his Word, coeternal with himself, God made this whole mass of the bodily world, with all the evident and familiar natures it contains. Another takes another, saying: "In the beginning God made heaven and earth" means that in his Word, coeternal with himself, he made the formless matter of the spiritual and the bodily creation. Another takes another, saying: "In the beginning God made heaven and earth" means that in his Word, coeternal with himself, God made the formless matter of the bodily creation, in which heaven and earth still lay jumbled together—the heaven and earth we now perceive, distinct and formed, in the mass of this world. Another takes another, saying: "In the beginning God made heaven and earth" means that at the very outset of his making and working God made formless matter holding heaven and earth in confusion, from which they have now been formed and stand out plainly, with all that is in them.

12.21.30 Likewise, as regards the understanding of the words that follow, out of all those truths one person takes one meaning, saying: "But the earth was invisible and unformed, and darkness was over the abyss" means that the bodily thing God made was still formless matter of bodily things, without order, without light. Another takes another, saying: "But the earth was invisible and unformed, and darkness was over the abyss" means that this whole, which was called heaven and earth, was still formless and dark matter, from which the bodily heaven and the bodily earth were to be made, with everything in them

that is known to the bodily senses. Another takes another, saying: "But the earth was invisible and unformed, and darkness was over the abyss" means that this whole, which was called heaven and earth, was still formless and dark matter, from which were to be made the intelligible heaven (called elsewhere "the heaven of heaven") and the earth—that is, all bodily nature, a name under which this bodily heaven too is understood; in other words, the matter from which every creature, invisible and visible, was to be made. Another takes another, saying: "But the earth was invisible and unformed, and darkness was over the abyss"—Scripture did not call that formlessness by the name heaven and earth; rather, he says, the formlessness itself already existed, which Scripture named the invisible and unformed earth and the dark abyss, and from which, as it had said just before, God made heaven and earth, that is, the spiritual and the bodily creation. Another takes another, saying: "But the earth was invisible and unformed, and darkness was over the abyss" means that there was already a certain formlessness, a matter from which, as Scripture said before, God made heaven and earth—namely the whole bodily mass of the world, divided into two very great parts, upper and lower, with all the ordinary and familiar creatures that are in them.

12.22.31 Now suppose someone tries to resist these last two opinions in this way: "If you will not allow that this formlessness of matter is what is meant by the name heaven and earth, then there was something God had not made, out of which he was to make heaven and earth. For Scripture does not tell us that God made this matter—unless we understand it to be signified by the words heaven and earth, or by the word earth alone, when it says, 'In the beginning God made heaven and earth.' Then what follows, 'But the earth was invisible and unformed,' even if it chose to call formless matter by that name, we would still understand to mean nothing but the matter God made in what was written just before: 'He made heaven and earth.'" When they hear this, the defenders of the two opinions we placed last, whichever of them it is, will reply: "We do not deny that this

formless matter was made by God—by God, from whom all things are very good. For just as we say that what is created and formed is a greater good, so we admit that what was made capable of being created and formed is a lesser good, but still a good. But Scripture did not record that God made this formlessness, just as it did not record many other things—the cherubim and seraphim, for instance, and those the apostle names one by one, 'thrones, dominions, principalities, powers'—all of which, nevertheless, God plainly made.[12] "Or if everything is included in the words 'He made heaven and earth,' what are we to say about the waters over which the Spirit of God was borne? If they are understood as included when earth is named, how can the name earth already be taken to mean formless matter, when we see how beautiful the waters are? Or if it is taken that way, why is it written that the firmament was made from that same formlessness and called heaven, yet not written that the waters were made? For the waters we see flowing in such lovely form are no longer formless and unseen. Or if they received that form when God said, 'Let the water that is under the firmament be gathered together,' so that the gathering is itself the forming, what answer will be given about the waters above the firmament? Formless, they would not have deserved so honored a place, and it is not written by what word they were formed.[13] "So if Genesis is silent about God having made something which sound faith and sure understanding do not doubt that God made—and no sober teaching will dare to say that these waters are coeternal with God merely because we hear them mentioned in the book of Genesis but do not find where they were made—why should we not also understand, as the truth teaches, that the formless matter which this Scripture calls the invisible and unformed earth and the dark abyss was made by God out of nothing, and so is not coeternal with him, even though this narrative has left out saying where it was made?"

12.23.32 Having heard and examined all this, as far as my weakness can grasp it—and I confess that weakness to you, my God,

12 Colossians 1:16.

who know it—I see that two kinds of disagreement can arise when something is reported in signs by truthful messengers: one, if the disagreement concerns the truth of the matter; the other, if it concerns the intention of the one reporting it. For it is one thing to ask what is true about the making of creation, another to ask what Moses, that outstanding servant in the household of your faith, wanted his reader and hearer to understand by these words. As for the first kind, let all who think they know what is false depart from me. As for the second, let all who think that Moses said what is false likewise depart from me. But let me be joined in you, Lord, with those who feed on your truth in the breadth of love, and delight in you with them; and let us approach the words of your book together, and seek in them your will through the will of your servant, by whose pen you gave them out.

12.24.33 But which of us has so found that will—among so many truths that meet those who seek in those words, understood now one way, now another—that he can say as confidently that Moses meant this, and wanted this to be understood in that narrative, as he says confidently that this is true, whether Moses meant it or something else? See, my God: I your servant, who have vowed you a sacrifice of confession in these writings and pray that by your mercy I may pay you my vows—see how confidently I say that in your unchangeable Word you made all things, invisible and visible. Do I say with the same confidence that Moses had nothing else in view but this when he wrote, "In the beginning God made heaven and earth"? No—for though I see this as certain in your truth, I do not see in the same way, in his mind, that he was thinking it when he wrote these words. For when he said "In the beginning," he could have been thinking "at the very outset of making." He could also have wanted heaven and earth, in this passage, to be understood not as any nature already formed and complete, whether spiritual or bodily, but as both of them only begun and still formless. I see, indeed, that whichever of these was said could have been said truly; but which of them he

13 Genesis 1:9.

had in mind in these words, I do not see in the same way. Yet whether that great man beheld in his mind one of these, or something else I have not mentioned, when he brought forth these words, I would not doubt that he saw truly and expressed it fittingly.

WHAT DID MOSES MEAN?

Augustine argues no one can be sure what Moses meant, and every true meaning should be welcomed.

12.25.34 Let no one trouble me now by telling me, "Moses did not mean what you say, but what I say." If he asked me, "How do you know that Moses meant what you draw out of these words of his?" I ought to take it calmly, and I might answer as I answered above, or somewhat more fully if he were more stubborn. But when he says, "He did not mean what you say, but what I say," and yet does not deny that what each of us says is true—O life of the poor, my God, in whose bosom there is no contradiction, rain soothing gentleness into my heart, so that I may bear such people patiently. They say this to me not because they are inspired and have seen in the heart of your servant what they say, but because they are proud. They do not know Moses' meaning; they love their own—not because it is true, but because it is theirs. Otherwise they would love another true meaning just as much, as I love what they say when they say what is true—not because it is theirs but because it is true; and for that very reason it is no longer theirs, because it is true. But if they love it because it is true, then it is both theirs and mine, since it is the common property of all lovers of truth. But their contention that Moses did not mean what I say but what they say—this I reject, this I do not love. For even if it is so, such rashness is a matter not of knowledge but of audacity; it was born not of insight but of conceit. That is why, Lord, your judgments are to be feared: because your truth is neither mine nor this person's nor that person's, but belongs to all of us whom you publicly call to share in it, warning us in terrible terms not to want to keep it

private, lest we be deprived of it. For whoever claims as his own what you set before everyone to enjoy, and wants what belongs to all to be his, is driven from what is common to what is his own—that is, from truth to a lie. For "whoever speaks a lie speaks from his own."[14]

12.25.35 Listen, best of judges, God, truth itself—listen to what I shall say to this objector; listen. For I speak before you and before my brothers, who use the law lawfully, to its end, which is love. Listen and see what I shall say to him, if it pleases you. These are the brotherly and peaceable words I return to him: "If we both see that what you say is true, and we both see that what I say is true, where, I ask, do we see it? Certainly not I in you, nor you in me, but both of us in the unchangeable truth itself, which is above our minds. Since, then, we do not quarrel about the very light of the Lord our God, why do we quarrel about the thoughts of our neighbor, which we cannot see as unchangeable truth is seen—when, even if Moses himself had appeared to us and said, 'This is what I meant,' we would not see it even then, but believe it? "So let no one be puffed up for one against another beyond what is written. Let us love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and our neighbor as ourselves. Unless we believe that whatever Moses meant in those books, he meant it for the sake of these two commandments of love, we shall make the Lord a liar, by holding an opinion about our fellow servant's mind other than what the Lord taught. See now how foolish it is, amid such an abundance of wholly true meanings as can be drawn from those words, rashly to assert which of them Moses chiefly meant, and by ruinous quarrels to offend against love itself, for whose sake he said everything—he whose words we are trying to explain."[15]

12.26.36 And yet, my God, height of my lowliness and rest of my labor, who hear my confessions and forgive my sins: since you command me to love my neighbor as myself, I cannot believe less of Moses, your most faithful servant, than I would wish and

14 John 8:44.
15 1 Corinthians 4:6.

long to be given to me by you as a gift, had I been born at the time he was and had you placed me where you placed him, so that through the service of my heart and tongue those writings might be given out which, so long afterward, were to benefit all nations and, from so lofty a height of authority, to prevail throughout the whole world over the words of all false and proud teachings. For I would wish—if I were Moses then (for we all come from the same lump; and "what is man, unless you are mindful of him?")—I would wish, then, if I were then what he was and you had assigned me the writing of the book of Genesis, to be given such power of expression and such a way of weaving my words that those who cannot yet understand how God creates would not reject what was said as beyond their strength, while those who already can would find, whatever true view their thinking had brought them to, that it had not been passed over in the few words of your servant; and if someone else had seen another view in the light of truth, that too would not be missing from those same words for him to understand.[16]

12.27.37 For just as a spring in a small place is more abundant, and supplies its flow to more streams over wider spaces, than any one of the streams led from that same spring through many places, so the narrative of your steward, meant to benefit many who would speak about it, wells up from a small measure of speech in floods of clear truth, from which each person draws for himself whatever truth he can about these matters—one this, another that—through the longer windings of discussion. For some, when they read or hear these words, think of God as if he were a man, or some mass endowed with immense power, which by some new and sudden decision made heaven and earth outside itself, as if in distant places—two great bodies, above and below, in which all things were to be contained. And when they hear, "God said, Let this be made, and it was made," they think of words that began and ended, sounding in time and passing away, and that as soon as they had passed, what was commanded to exist came into existence; and whatever else of

16 Romans 9:21; Psalm 8:4.

this sort they may suppose from their familiarity with the flesh. In these little ones, still at the level of the senses, while their weakness is carried in this humblest kind of language as in a mother's arms, faith is built up in a healthy way, so that they may hold firmly and surely that God made all the natures their senses survey in their wonderful variety. But if one of them scorns these words as if they were cheap, and in proud weakness stretches himself out beyond the cradle that nurses him—alas! the poor thing will fall. Lord God, have mercy, lest those who pass along the road trample the unfledged chick; and send your angel to put it back in the nest, so that it may live until it can fly.

12.28.38 But others, for whom these words are no longer a nest but shady thickets, see fruit hidden in them; they fly about rejoicing, chirp as they search it out, and pluck it. For when they read or hear these words, they see, eternal God, that you surpass all past and future times in your stable permanence, and yet that there is nothing in temporal creation that you did not make. And your will, because it is what you are, was in no way changed, nor did some will arise that had not been before, when you made all things. You made them not out of yourself, as your likeness, the form of all things, but out of nothing, as a formless unlikeness, which was to be formed through your likeness by returning to you, the One, according to the ordered capacity given to each thing in its own kind. And so all things were to become very good, whether they remain close to you or, at a distance that grows by degrees, through times and places, bring about or undergo beautiful variations. They see these things and rejoice in the light of your truth, as far as they are able here.

12.28.39 One of them fixes his attention on the words "In the beginning God made," and looks to Wisdom, the Beginning, because it also speaks to us. Another likewise attends to the same words and understands "beginning" as the start of created things, taking "In the beginning he made" as if it said "At first he made." And among those who understand "in the beginning" to mean that you made heaven and earth in wisdom, one believes

that the matter capable of being made into heaven and earth is itself called heaven and earth; another, that natures already formed and distinct are meant; another, that one formed nature, a spiritual one, is meant by the name heaven, and another, formless, of bodily matter, by the name earth. Those who understand by the names heaven and earth the still formless matter from which heaven and earth were to be formed do not all understand it in one way either: one takes it as the matter from which the intelligible and the sensible creation was to be completed; another only as that from which this sensible bodily mass was to come, holding in its great lap natures plain and ready to view. Nor do those who believe that in this passage creatures already arranged and set in order are called heaven and earth all agree: one takes it as the invisible and the visible creation, another as the visible alone, in which we look up at the shining heaven and the dark earth and all that is in them.

12.29.40 But the one who takes "In the beginning he made" only as if it said "At first he made" has no way to understand heaven and earth truly unless he understands the matter of heaven and earth—that is, of the entire creation, intelligible and bodily. For if he wants it to mean the entire creation already formed, he could rightly be asked: if God made this first, what did he make afterward? He will find nothing after the whole, and so he will have to hear, unwillingly, "How 'first,' if nothing afterward?" But when he says it was first formless, then formed, he is not absurd, provided he is able to distinguish what comes before by eternity, what by time, what by preference, and what by origin: by eternity, as God is before all things; by time, as the flower before the fruit; by preference, as the fruit before the flower; by origin, as the sound before the song. Of these four, the first and the last I mentioned are very hard to understand, the middle two very easy. For it is a rare vision and exceedingly hard, Lord, to behold your eternity making changeable things unchangeably, and for that reason being before them. And then, who has a mind sharp enough to discern without great labor how the sound is before the song? It is because a song is formed sound;

and something unformed can certainly exist, but what does not exist cannot be formed. In this way matter is before what is made from it—not before it as if it made it, since rather it is made; nor before it by an interval of time. For we do not first, at an earlier time, utter formless sounds without song and then, at a later time, fit or shape them into the form of a song, as with the wood from which a chest is built or the silver from which a vessel is fashioned. Such materials do precede in time the forms of the things made from them; but with song it is not so. For when a song is sung, its sound is heard; it does not first sound formlessly and then get formed into song. Whatever sounded first, in whatever way, passes away, and you will find nothing of it to take up again and compose by art. So the song has its being in its sound, and that sound is its matter; for the sound itself is formed so that there may be a song. And therefore, as I was saying, the matter of sounding is prior to the form of singing. Not prior in power to make: the sound is not the maker of the song, but it lies ready, from the body, for the singing soul to make a song from. Nor prior in time: it is uttered at the same moment as the song. Nor prior in preference: sound is not better than song, since a song is not merely sound but beautiful sound. But it is prior in origin, because the song is not formed so that there may be sound, but the sound is formed so that there may be a song. Let whoever can, then, understand by this example that the matter of things was made first and called heaven and earth, because heaven and earth were made from it; and yet it was not made first in time, because it is the forms of things that give rise to time, whereas it was formless, and is perceived together with them in time. Yet nothing can be told about it except as though it came first in time, though it is ranked last in worth—for formed things are surely better than formless ones—and it is itself preceded by the eternity of the Creator, so that there might be, out of nothing, something from which something could be made.

12.30.41 Amid this diversity of true opinions, may truth itself bring forth harmony, and may our God have mercy on us, so that we use the law lawfully, for the end of the commandment,

pure love. And so, if anyone asks me which of these your servant Moses meant, these would not be my confessions if I did not confess to you, "I do not know." And yet I know that those opinions are true—apart from the fleshly ones, about which I have said what I thought; though even those little ones, who are of good hope, are not frightened by these words of your book, which speak of lofty things humbly and of much in few words. But all of us who, as I acknowledge, see and speak what is true in these words—let us love one another, and together love you, our God, the fountain of truth, if it is truth itself we thirst for and not empty things. And let us so honor that same servant of yours, the steward of this Scripture, full of your Spirit, as to believe that when he wrote these things, by your revelation, he had in view what most excels in them, both in the light of truth and in the fruit of usefulness.

12.31.42 So when one person says, "He meant what I mean," and another, "No, what I mean," I think it more reverent to say: "Why not both, rather, if both are true? And if anyone sees a third, or a fourth, or any other true meaning at all in these words, why not believe that he saw all of them—he through whom the one God tempered the sacred writings to the understanding of the many who would see in them things true and diverse?" Certainly for my part—and I declare it fearlessly from my heart—if I were writing something to stand at the summit of authority, I would rather write so that my words would echo whatever truth anyone could grasp about these things, than set down one true meaning so plainly as to exclude the others, in which no falsehood could offend me. So, my God, I do not want to be so headlong as not to believe that this man was granted this by you. When he wrote these words, he fully meant and had in mind whatever truth we have been able to find here, and whatever truth we have not been able, or not yet been able, to find, but which can still be found in them.

12.32.43 Finally, Lord, you who are God and not flesh and blood: even if a human being saw less, could anything be hidden from your good Spirit, who "will lead me into the land of upright-

ness"—anything that you yourself were going to reveal in these words to later readers, even if the man through whom they were spoken perhaps had in mind only one of many true meanings? If so, then let the one he had in mind be higher than the rest. But to us, Lord, show either that one or any other true one you please, so that whether you disclose to us what you disclosed to that man of yours or something else on the occasion of the same words, it may still be you who feed us, and not error that deceives us. See, Lord my God, how much we have written about a few words—how much, I ask you! What strength of ours, what length of time, would be enough for all your books at this rate?[17] Let me, then, confess to you more briefly about them, and choose some one meaning that you have inspired, true, certain and good, even if many occur to me where many can occur—with this faithfulness in my confession: that if I say what your minister meant, I say it rightly and best (for that is what I must strive for); and if I do not reach that, I may still say what your truth wished to say to me through his words—the truth that also said to him what it wished.

17 Psalm 143:10.

Book XIII

Creation: the days of Genesis
Augustine reads the days of creation as an allegory of the Church and ends in praise.

CALLED INTO BEING BY GOODNESS

Augustine praises God for creating all things out of pure goodness, not from any need.

13.1.1 I call on you, my God, my mercy, who made me and did not forget me when I forgot you. I call you into my soul, which you are preparing to receive you through the longing you breathed into it. Do not abandon me now when I call on you, for before I called you came to meet me, and pressed on me, more and more insistently, with voices of many kinds, so that I heard from far off, and turned, and called on you as you were calling me. For you, Lord, wiped out all my bad deserts, so as not to repay my hands, by which I fell away from you; and you came before all my good deserts, so as to repay your own hands, by which you made me. For before I was, you were, and there was no me for you to grant being to; and yet see, I am—out of your goodness, which came before all that you made me and all that you made me from. For you did not need me, nor am I such a good that I could be of help to you, my Lord and my God. I do not serve you as though you might otherwise grow tired in your work, or your power be lessened without my service; nor do I tend you as one tends the soil, as though you would lie untended if I did not tend you. Rather, I serve you and tend you in worship so that it may

go well with me from you, from whom I have it that I exist as someone with whom it can go well.[1]

13.2.2 For it is out of the fullness of your goodness that your creation exists: so that a good which would profit you nothing, and which, not being made of your own substance, would not be equal to you, should nonetheless not be lacking, since it could be made by you. For what claim did heaven and earth, which you made in the beginning, have on you? Let the spiritual and the bodily natures, which you made in your wisdom, say what claim they had on you, that even things only begun and formless, each in its own kind, spiritual or bodily, should depend on it—things drifting toward excess and toward a far unlikeness to you. The spiritual, even formless, is more excellent than a formed body would be; the bodily, even formless, more excellent than if it were nothing at all. And so, formless, they would have hung upon your Word, unless through that same Word they were called back to your unity and formed, and so, from you, the one supreme good, all became very good. What claim had they on you, that they should exist even as formless, when they would not have been even that except from you?

13.2.3 What claim had bodily matter on you, that it should be even invisible and unformed, when it would not have been even that unless you had made it? And so, since it did not exist, it could have no claim on you to exist. Or what claim had the first beginning of spiritual creation on you, that it should even drift, dark, like the abyss, unlike you—unless through that same Word it were turned toward the same one who made it, and, enlightened by him, became light, conformed, though not as an equal, to the Form that is equal to you? For just as for a body to be is not the same as to be beautiful (otherwise it could not be ugly), so for a created spirit to live is not the same as to live wisely; otherwise it would be unchangeably wise. But it is good for it always to cling to you, lest the light it gained by turning toward you it lose by turning away, and slip back into a life like the dark abyss. For we too, who in our souls are a spiritual cre-

1 The Latin verb colere means both "to till the soil" and "to worship."

ation, turned away from you, our light, and in that life we were once darkness; and we still labor among the remnants of our obscurity, until in your only Son we become your righteousness, like the mountains of God. For we were your judgments, like a great abyss.[2]

13.3.4 As for what you said in the first acts of creation, "Let there be light, and there was light," I do not think it unfitting to understand this of the spiritual creation, because there was already life of a sort for you to enlighten. But just as it had no claim on you to be a life of the kind that could be enlightened, so, once it existed, it had no claim on you to be enlightened. For its formlessness would not please you unless it became light—not by merely existing, but by gazing on the light that enlightened it and clinging to it—so that both its living at all and its living happily it might owe to nothing but your grace, turned by a change for the better toward that which can change neither for better nor for worse. That is what you alone are, because you alone simply are; for you, to live is not one thing and to live happily another, because you are your own happiness.[3]

13.4.5 What, then, would be lacking to the good that you are to yourself, even if these things had not existed at all, or had remained formless? You made them not out of need but out of the fullness of your goodness, restraining them and turning them toward form—not as though your joy were to be completed by them. For to you, who are perfect, their imperfection is displeasing, so that they may be perfected by you and please you; but not as though you were imperfect and were yourself to be perfected by their perfection. For your good Spirit was borne above the waters, not borne up by them as though he rested on them; for those in whom your Spirit is said to rest, he makes to rest in himself. But it was your incorruptible and unchangeable will, sufficient in itself for itself, that was borne above that life which you had made. It is a life for which to live is not the same as to live happily, since it lives even while drifting in its own

2 Echoing Psalm 36:6.
3 Genesis 1:3.

darkness; what remains for it is to turn to him by whom it was made, and to live more and more beside the fountain of life, and in his light to see light, and to be made perfect, and illumined, and happy.

THE TRINITY IN GENESIS

Augustine finds the Trinity in Genesis and the Spirit moving over the waters.

13.5.6 Look: there appears to me, as in a riddle, the Trinity, which is what you are, my God. For you, Father, in the Beginning of our wisdom—which is your Wisdom, born of you, equal to you and coeternal, that is, in your Son—made heaven and earth. And we have said much about the heaven of heaven, and about the earth invisible and unformed, and about the dark abyss, in view of the wandering lapses of its spiritual formlessness, had it not turned to him from whom it had life of whatever kind, and by his illumination become a beautiful life, and been the heaven of that heaven which was made afterward between water and water. And already I held the Father, under the name of God, who made these things, and the Son, under the name of the Beginning, in whom he made them; and believing, as I did believe, that my God is a Trinity, I searched in his holy words—and look: "your Spirit was borne above the waters."[4] Look: the Trinity, my God—Father and Son and Holy Spirit, Creator of all creation.

13.6.7 But what was the reason—O Light that tells the truth, I bring my heart close to you: do not let it teach me empty things; scatter its darkness and tell me, I beg you by love, our mother, I beg you, tell me—what was the reason that only after heaven had been named, and the earth invisible and unformed, and darkness over the abyss, did your Scripture at last name your Spirit? Was it because he had to be introduced in such a way that he could be said to be borne above? That could not be said unless the thing above which your Spirit could be understood to

4 Augustine reads "in the beginning" (in principio) as "in the Beginning," that is, in the Son.

be borne were mentioned first. For he was not borne above the Father or the Son, nor could he rightly be said to be borne above if he were borne above nothing. So first there had to be stated what he was borne above, and then he who was fittingly mentioned in no other way than by being said to be borne above. Why then was it not fitting for him to be introduced in any other way than by being said to be borne above?

13.7.8 From here let anyone who can follow with his understanding your apostle, who says that your love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us; who teaches about spiritual things and shows the way of love that surpasses all; and who bends his knees to you for us, that we may know the knowledge of the love of Christ that surpasses all. That is why he who surpasses all was, from the beginning, borne above the waters. To whom shall I tell it, and how shall I tell of the weight of craving, pulling down into the sheer abyss, and of the lifting up by love through your Spirit, who was borne above the waters? To whom shall I tell it? How shall I tell it? For these are not places in which we are plunged and from which we rise. What could be more like, and what more unlike?[5] They are affections, they are loves: the uncleanness of our spirit, flowing downward with love of cares, and your holiness, lifting us upward with love of freedom from care, so that we may lift up our hearts to you, where your Spirit was borne above the waters, and may come to the rest that surpasses all, when our soul has passed through the waters that have no substance.[6]

13.8.9 The angel flowed away, the soul of man flowed away, and they would have shown the abyss of the whole spiritual creation in the dark depths, had you not said from the beginning, "Let there be light," and there was light; and had not every obedient intelligence of your heavenly city clung to you and rested in your Spirit, who is borne unchangeably above everything changeable. Otherwise even the heaven of heaven itself would

5 1 Corinthians 12:31; Ephesians 3:14–19.

6 "Lift up our hearts" echoes the liturgy's Sursum corda; "the waters that have no substance" is Psalm 124:5 in Augustine's Latin.

be a dark abyss in itself; but now it is light in the Lord. For even in the wretched restlessness of spirits that flow away and show their own darkness, stripped of the garment of your light, you show clearly enough how great a rational creature you have made: nothing less than you suffices for its happy rest—and so not even itself suffices. For you, our God, will light up our darkness; from you our garments arise, and our darkness will be like noonday. Give me yourself, my God; give yourself back to me. Look, I love you—and if it is too little, let me love more strongly. I cannot measure it, to know how much love I lack of what is enough, so that my life may run into your embrace and not turn away until it is hidden in the hidden place of your face. This alone I know: that without you it goes badly with me—not only outside myself but within myself too—and that every abundance which is not my God is poverty to me.

13.9.10 Was neither the Father nor the Son borne above the waters? If this means as in a place, like a body, then neither was the Holy Spirit; but if it means the pre-eminence of unchangeable divinity above everything changeable, then Father and Son and Holy Spirit were all borne above the waters. Why then was this said only of your Spirit? Why was it said of him alone, as though there were a place where he was—he who is not a place—he of whom alone it is said that he is your gift? In your gift we rest; there we enjoy you. Our rest is our place. Love lifts us up there, and your good Spirit raises our lowliness from the gates of death. In your good will is our peace. A body strives by its own weight toward its own place. Weight does not tend only downward, but toward its own place.

MY WEIGHT IS MY LOVE

Augustine explains that love, like weight, carries the soul to its proper resting place.

Fire tends upward, a stone downward; they are driven by their weights, they seek their own places. Oil poured under water rises above the water; water poured on top of oil sinks beneath

the oil; they are driven by their weights, they seek their own places. Things out of order are restless; they are set in order, and they rest. My weight is my love; by it I am carried wherever I am carried. By your gift we are set on fire and carried upward; we burn, and we go. We climb the ascents in our heart and sing the song of ascents. With your fire, your good fire, we burn and we go, because we are going upward to the peace of Jerusalem; for I was glad when they said to me, "We will go into the house of the Lord." There good will shall settle us, so that we want nothing else than to remain there forever.[7]

13.10.11 Happy the creature that has known nothing else—though in itself it would have been something else—had it not, by your gift which is borne above everything changeable, been lifted up as soon as it was made, with no interval of time, by that call in which you said, "Let there be light," and there was light. For in us there is a distinction in time, in that we were darkness and shall be made light; but of that creature it is said what it would have been had it not been illumined. And it is spoken of as if it had first been fluid and dark, so that the cause might appear by which it came to be otherwise: that is, turned toward the unfailing Light, it became light. Let whoever can, understand; let him ask it of you. Why should he trouble me, as if I were the one who enlightens every human being who comes into this world?

13.11.12 Who will understand the almighty Trinity? And who does not speak of it—if indeed it is of it that he speaks? Rare is the soul that, when it speaks of it, knows what it is saying. People argue and fight, and no one sees that vision without peace. I would like people to reflect on these three things in themselves. These three are something far other than that Trinity; but I mention them as a place where they may exercise themselves, and test themselves, and perceive how far away they are. The three I mean are these: to be, to know, to will. For I am, and I know, and I will. I am, knowing and willing; I know that I am and that I will; and I will to be and to know. So in these

7 Psalms 120–134 are titled "Songs of Ascents"; the quotation is Psalm 122:1.

three, how inseparable a life there is—one life, one mind, one essence—how inseparable, finally, the distinction, and yet a distinction: let whoever can, see it. He certainly has it before him; let him look into himself, and see, and tell me. But when he has found something in these and has spoken of it, let him not think he has now found that which is above them, unchangeable: which is unchangeably, and knows unchangeably, and wills unchangeably. And whether there is a Trinity there because of these three; or whether these three are in each Person, so that each has all three; or whether both are true, in wonderful ways, simply and manifoldly, with an infinite end in itself and for itself, by which it is, and is known to itself, and suffices to itself, unchangeably the Selfsame, in the abundant greatness of its unity—who could easily conceive it? Who could express it in any way? Who would rashly pronounce on it in any way at all?

13.12.13 Go forward in confession, my faith; say to the Lord your God, "Holy, holy, holy, O Lord my God; in your name we have been baptized, Father and Son and Holy Spirit; in your name we baptize, Father and Son and Holy Spirit." For among us too, in his Christ, God made heaven and earth: the spiritual and the carnal members of his Church. And our earth, before it received the form of teaching, was invisible and unformed, and we were covered by the darkness of ignorance, since you disciplined man for his iniquity, and your judgments are a great abyss. But because your Spirit was borne above the water, your mercy did not abandon our misery, and you said, "Let there be light": "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." "Repent"; "Let there be light." And because our soul was troubled within us, we remembered you, Lord, from the land of the Jordan and from the mountain equal to you but made small for our sake; and our darkness displeased us, and we turned to you, and there was light. And see: we were once darkness, but now we are light in the Lord.[8]

13.13.14 And yet still by faith, not yet by sight; for in hope we have been saved. But hope that is seen is not hope. Still deep

calls to deep, but now in the voice of your waterfalls. Still even he who says, "I could not speak to you as to spiritual people, but as to carnal," does not himself yet think he has laid hold of it; forgetting what lies behind, he stretches out toward what lies ahead, and groans under his burden, and his soul thirsts for the living God as the deer for springs of water, and he says, "When shall I come?"—longing to be clothed with his dwelling that is from heaven. And he calls to the lower deep, saying, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be reformed in the newness of your mind," and, "Do not become children in your minds, but be infants in malice, so that you may be mature in your minds," and, "O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?" But now not in his own voice; it is in yours, who sent your Spirit from on high through him who ascended on high and opened the floodgates of his gifts, so that the rush of the river might gladden your city.[9] For it is for him that the friend of the bridegroom sighs, already holding the first fruits of the Spirit with him, but still groaning within himself as he waits for adoption, the redemption of his body. He sighs for him, for he is a member of the bride; and he is jealous for him, for he is the friend of the bridegroom. He is jealous for him, not for himself, because it is in the voice of your waterfalls, not in his own voice, that he calls to the other deep; and in his jealousy he fears for it, lest, as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, so their minds too be corrupted from the chastity that is in our Bridegroom, your only Son. What is that light of sight? It is when we shall see him as he is, and the tears have passed that have been my bread day and night, while it is said to me every day, "Where is your God?"[10]

13.14.15 And I say, "Where is my God?" See, this is where you are. I breathe a little in you, when I pour out my soul above myself in a voice of rejoicing and confession, the sound of one keeping festival. And still it is sad, because it slips back and becomes an

8 Matthew 3:2. The Jordan and the mountain echo Psalm 42:6; Augustine takes the mountain as Christ.
9 2 Corinthians 5:7; Romans 8:24; Psalm 42:1–2, 7; 1 Corinthians 3:1; Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 14:20; Galatians 3:1.
10 2 Corinthians 11:2–3; 1 John 3:2.

abyss—or rather it feels that it is still an abyss. My faith, which you lit in the night before my feet, says to it, "Why are you sad, my soul, and why do you trouble me? Hope in the Lord." His word is a lamp to your feet. Hope and persevere, until the night passes, the mother of the wicked; until the wrath of the Lord passes, for we too were once children of wrath, we who were darkness—and we still drag its remnants about in the body that is dead because of sin; until the day breathes and the shadows are removed. Hope in the Lord: in the morning I will stand and gaze; I will always confess to him.[11] In the morning I will stand and see the salvation of my face, my God, who will give life even to our mortal bodies through the Spirit who dwells in us, because in mercy he was borne above our dark and fluid inner being. From this, in this pilgrimage, we have received a pledge, so that already we are light, while we are still saved in hope, and are children of light and children of the day, not children of the night or of darkness—which, nevertheless, we once were. Between them and us, in this still uncertain state of human knowledge, you alone divide, you who test our hearts and call the light day and the darkness night. For who distinguishes us but you? And what do we have that we did not receive from you, vessels made for honor from the same lump from which others were made for dishonor?[12]

THE FIRMAMENT OF SCRIPTURE

Augustine reads the firmament as Scripture, spread above humanity like a skin.

13.15.16 Or who but you, our God, made for us a firmament of authority above us in your divine Scripture? For heaven will be folded up like a book, and now it is stretched out above us like a skin. For your divine Scripture has a more exalted authority now that those mortals through whom you dispensed it to us

11 Psalms 42:4–5 and 119:105; Ephesians 2:3; Romans 8:10; Song of Songs 2:17; Psalm 5:3.
12 Romans 8:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:5; Genesis 1:5.

have met their death. And you know, Lord, you know how you clothed human beings with skins when through sin they became mortal. So you stretched out the firmament of your book like a skin—your words, all in harmony, which you placed above us through the ministry of mortals. For by their very death the solid strength of authority in your words, published through them, is stretched out on high above everything beneath it, which while they lived here was not stretched out so high. You had not yet stretched out the heaven like a skin; you had not yet spread the fame of their death everywhere.[13]

13.15.17 Let us look, Lord, upon the heavens, the work of your fingers; clear from our eyes the cloud with which you have veiled them. There is your testimony, giving wisdom to little ones. Perfect, my God, your praise from the mouth of infants and nursing babies. For we know no other books that so destroy pride, that so destroy the enemy and the defender who resists your reconciliation by defending his own sins. I do not know, Lord, I do not know any other words so pure, that so persuaded me to confession, and bent my neck gently to your yoke, and invited me to worship you freely. Let me understand them, good Father; grant me this, for I am placed beneath them, since it is for those placed beneath them that you made them firm.[14]

13.15.18 There are other waters above this firmament, immortal, I believe, and set apart from earthly corruption. Let them praise your name; let them praise you, the peoples of your angels above the heavens, who have no need to look up at this firmament and come to know your word by reading. For they always see your face, and there they read, without the syllables of time, what your eternal will wills. They read, they choose, and they love; they are always reading, and what they read never passes away. For by choosing and loving they read the very unchangeableness of your counsel. Their book is not closed, nor is their scroll rolled up, because you yourself are this to them, and are so forever; for you set them in order above this firmament,

13 Isaiah 34:4; Psalm 104:2. The Latin pellis means both "skin" and "parchment."
14 Psalms 8:2–3 and 19:7.

which you made firm above the infirmity of the lower peoples, so that they might look up at it and come to know your mercy, proclaiming in time you who made times. For your mercy, Lord, is in heaven, and your truth reaches to the clouds.[15] The clouds pass, but the heaven remains. The preachers of your word pass from this life into another life, but your Scripture is stretched out over the peoples to the end of the age. Yet even heaven and earth will pass away, but your words will not pass away; for the skin will be folded up, and the grass over which it was stretched will pass away with its splendor, but your Word remains forever. It appears to us now in the riddle of the clouds and through the mirror of the heaven, not as it is; for though we too are loved by your Son, it has not yet appeared what we shall be. He looked through the lattice of the flesh, and he spoke tenderly, and he set us on fire, and we run after his fragrance. But when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. As he is, Lord —that sight is ours, but it is not ours yet.[16]

13.16.19 For how you are absolutely, you alone know—you who are unchangeably, and know unchangeably, and will unchangeably. Your essence knows and wills unchangeably, your knowledge is and wills unchangeably, and your will is and knows unchangeably. Nor does it seem right in your sight that, as the unchangeable Light knows itself, so it should be known by the changeable thing it illumines. So my soul is like earth without water before you, because just as it cannot illumine itself from itself, so it cannot satisfy itself from itself. For so with you is the fountain of life, as in your light we shall see light.[17]

15 Genesis 1:7; Matthew 18:10; Psalm 36:5. "They read, they choose, and they love" renders a Latin chime: legunt, eligunt, diligunt.
16 Matthew 24:35; Isaiah 40:6–8; Song of Songs 2:9 and 1:3.
17 Psalm 143:6.

THE DAYS OF CREATION

Augustine reads the days of creation as an allegory of the Church and the Christian life.

13.17.20 Who gathered the embittered into one society? For they all have the same end, temporal and earthly happiness, for the sake of which they do everything, though they toss about in a countless variety of cares. Who, Lord, but you, who said that the waters should be gathered into one gathering and the dry land appear, thirsting for you? For the sea is yours, and you made it, and your hands formed the dry land. For it is not the bitterness of wills but the gathering of waters that is called the sea. For you restrain even the evil cravings of souls and fix limits, how far the waters may be allowed to advance, so that their waves break against themselves; and so you make the sea by the order of your rule over all things.[18]

13.17.21 But souls that thirst for you and appear before you, set apart from the society of the sea by a different end, you water from a hidden and sweet spring, so that the earth too may yield its fruit. And it yields its fruit; and at your command, the command of its Lord God, our soul sprouts works of mercy according to its kind, loving its neighbor by helping with bodily needs, having in itself seed according to its likeness. For from our own weakness we feel compassion so as to come to the aid of the needy, helping them in the way we would want help brought to us if we were in the same need—not only in easy things, as with seed-bearing grass, but also in protective help of stout strength, like a fruit-bearing tree: that is, doing good by rescuing one who suffers wrong from the hand of the powerful, and by giving the shade of protection with the stout strength of just judgment.[19]

13.18.22 So, Lord, so, I pray you, let it spring up—as you are doing, as you are giving cheerfulness and the means—let truth spring up from the earth, and let justice look down from

18 Genesis 1:9–10; Psalm 95:5. Augustine plays on mare (sea) and amarus (bitter).
19 Genesis 1:11–12.

heaven, and let there be lights in the firmament. Let us break our bread for the hungry and bring the homeless poor into our house; let us clothe the naked and not despise those of our own flesh and blood. When these fruits have sprung from the earth, see that it is good, and let our light break forth in its season; and, from this lower harvest of action, attaining to the delights of contemplation, holding fast to the word of life above, let us appear like lights in the world, cleaving to the firmament of your Scripture.[20] For there you reason with us, so that we may divide between the things of the intellect and the things of the senses, as between day and night, or between souls given to the things of the intellect and souls given to the things of the senses. So now it is not you alone, in the secret of your judgment, who divide between light and darkness, as you did before the firmament was made; but your spiritual people too, placed and set in their ranks in that same firmament, now that your grace has been made manifest throughout the world, may shine upon the earth and divide between day and night and mark the seasons: because the old things have passed away, and see, new things have come; and because our salvation is nearer than when we first believed; and because the night is far gone and the day has drawn near; and because you bless the crown of your year, sending workers into your harvest, for whose sowing others have labored, and sending them also into another sowing, whose harvest is at the end.[21] So you grant the prayers of one who asks, and you bless the years of the just; but you are the Selfsame, and in your years, which do not fail, you prepare a granary for the passing years. For by your eternal counsel, at their proper times, you give heavenly goods upon the earth. For to one is given through the Spirit the word

13.18.23 of wisdom, like the greater light, for those who delight in the light of clear truth, as at the beginning of the day; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit, like the

20 Psalm 85:11; Isaiah 58:7–8; Philippians 2:15–16.
21 Genesis 1:14–18; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 13:11–12; Psalm 65:11; Matthew 9:38; John 4:38.

lesser light; to another faith; to another gifts of healing; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another the discernment of spirits; to another various kinds of tongues—and all these are like stars. For all these are the work of one and the same Spirit, distributing to each individually as he wills, and making the stars appear in manifestation for the common good. But the word of knowledge, which contains all the sacraments that vary with the times like the moon, and the other gifts of knowledge listed after it like stars—as far as they fall short of that brightness of wisdom in which the day mentioned above rejoices, so far are they at the beginning of the night.[22] For they are necessary to those to whom that most prudent servant of yours could not speak as to spiritual people, but as to carnal—he who speaks wisdom among the mature. But the unspiritual person, like a little child in Christ and a drinker of milk, until he is strong enough for solid food and steadies his eyes to look at the sun, should not find his night deserted, but be content with the light of the moon and stars. These things you discuss with us most wisely, our God, in your book, your firmament, so that we may discern all things in wonderful contemplation, though still in signs and times and days and years.[23]

13.19.24 "But first wash yourselves, be clean, remove the wickedness from your souls and from the sight of my eyes, so that the dry land may appear. Learn to do good, give judgment for the orphan and do justice for the widow, so that the earth may bring forth green pasture and fruit-bearing trees. And come, let us reason together," says the Lord, "so that there may be lights in the firmament of heaven, and they may shine upon the earth." That rich man asked the good teacher what he should do to gain eternal life. Let the good teacher—whom he thought a man and nothing more (but he is good because he is God)—let him tell him that if he wants to come to life he must keep the commandments: separate from himself the bitterness of malice and wickedness; not kill, not commit adultery, not steal, not bear

22 1 Corinthians 12:7–11; Genesis 1:16.
23 1 Corinthians 2:6, 2:14 and 3:1–2; Genesis 1:14.

false witness; so that the dry land may appear and bring forth honor for mother and father and love of neighbor.[24] "I have done all these things," he says. Then where do so many thorns come from, if the earth is fruitful? Go, root out the tangled thickets of greed; sell what you possess, and be filled with harvest by giving to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and follow the Lord if you want to be perfect, joined with those among whom wisdom is spoken by him who knows what to allot to the day and to the night—so that you too may know, so that for you too there may be lights in the firmament of heaven. That will not happen unless your heart is there; and that again will not happen unless your treasure is there, as you heard from the good teacher. But the barren earth was saddened, and the thorns choked the word.[25]

13.19.25 But you, the chosen race in the firmament of the world, who have left everything to follow the Lord: go after him and put the strong to shame; go after him, you beautiful feet, and shine in the firmament, so that the heavens may tell his glory, dividing between the light of the perfect—though not yet like that of the angels—and the darkness of the little ones—though not of the hopeless. Shine over all the earth; and let the day, bright with the sun, pour forth to the day the word of wisdom, and the night, shining with the moon, announce to the night the word of knowledge. The moon and stars shine for the night, but the night does not darken them, since they give it light according to its small capacity.[26] For see: as though God were saying, "Let there be lights in the firmament of heaven," suddenly there came a sound from heaven, like the rush of a violent wind, and there appeared divided tongues as of fire, and it rested on each one of them; and lights were made in the firmament of heaven, holding the word of life. Run everywhere, holy fires, beautiful fires. For you are the light of the world, and you are not under a basket. He to whom you have clung has been exalted, and he has

24 Isaiah 1:16–18, interwoven with Genesis 1; Matthew 19:16–19.
25 Matthew 19:20–22, 6:21 and 13:7.
26 1 Peter 2:9; 1 Corinthians 1:27; Romans 10:15; Psalm 19:1–2.

exalted you. Run everywhere, and make yourselves known to all nations.[27]

13.20.26 Let the sea too conceive and bring forth your works, and let the waters bring forth creeping things with living souls. For by separating the precious from the worthless you have become the mouth of God, through which he might say, "Let the waters bring forth"—not a living soul, which the earth will bring forth, but "creeping things with living souls, and birds flying above the earth." For your sacraments, God, have crept through the works of your saints amid the waves of the world's temptations, to steep the nations in your name in your baptism. And meanwhile great wonders were done, like great sea creatures, and the voices of your messengers flew above the earth, close to the firmament of your book, which was set over them as their authority, beneath which they were to fly wherever they went.[28] For there is no speech, no language, in which their voices are not heard, since their sound has gone out into all the earth and their words to the ends of the world; for you, Lord, by blessing, have multiplied these things.[29]

13.20.27 Am I lying, or mixing things together in confusion, and failing to distinguish the luminous knowledge of these things in the firmament of heaven from the bodily works in the surging sea and under the firmament of heaven? For of those things whose knowledge is solid and bounded, without increase through generations—like the lights of wisdom and knowledge—the bodily workings are many and varied, and, growing one from another, they multiply in your blessing, God. For you have consoled the weariness of mortal senses, so that in the mind's understanding one thing may be figured and expressed in many ways through bodily motions. The waters brought these forth, but in your Word. The needs of peoples estranged from the eternity of your truth brought these forth, but in your gospel;

27 Acts 2:2–3; Matthew 5:14–15.
28 Genesis 1:20–21; Jeremiah 15:19.
29 Psalm 19:3–4; Genesis 1:22.

for it was these very waters that cast them up, waters whose bitter sickness was the reason they came forth in your Word.

13.20.28 And all things are beautiful because you make them, and look—you who made all things are more beautiful beyond telling. If Adam had not fallen away from you, there would not have flowed from his womb that salt water of the sea—the human race, deeply curious, stormily swollen, and restlessly fluid—and so there would be no need for your stewards to perform, bodily and perceptibly, amid many waters, mystical deeds and words (for this is how I now understand the creeping things and the birds). Instructed and initiated by these, people who are subject to bodily sacraments would make no further progress unless the soul came alive spiritually on another level, and after the word of initiation looked toward its completion.

13.21.29 And so, in your Word, it is not the depth of the sea but the earth, separated from the bitterness of the waters, that brings forth—not creeping things with living souls, and birds, but a living soul. For it no longer needs baptism, as the nations need it, and as it did need it when it was covered with waters; for there is no other way into the kingdom of heaven since you established that it should be entered this way. Nor does it look for great wonders to produce faith. For it is not that it will not believe unless it sees signs and wonders, since now the faithful earth is separated from the waters of the sea, bitter with unbelief; and tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers. So the earth which you founded above the waters has no need of this kind of flying creature either, which the waters brought forth at your Word. Send your word into it through your messengers; for it is their works we tell of.[30] But it is you who work in them, so that they may work a living soul. The earth brings it forth, because the earth is the reason they do these things in it, just as the sea was the reason they produced creeping things with living souls, and birds under the firmament of heaven. The earth no longer needs these, although it eats the fish raised from the deep, at the table which you have prepared in the sight of

30 Genesis 1:24; John 3:5 and 4:48; 1 Corinthians 14:22; Psalm 136:6.

believers; for it was raised from the deep precisely to feed the dry land. And the birds are offspring of the sea, yet they multiply on the earth. For human unbelief was the reason for the first voices that preached the gospel; but the faithful too are encouraged by them and blessed by them in many ways from day to day.[31] But the living soul takes its beginning from the earth, because it profits only those already faithful to restrain themselves from love of this world, so that their soul may live to you—the soul that was dead while living in pleasures, pleasures, Lord, that bring death; for you are the life-giving pleasure of the pure heart.[32]

13.21.30 So let your ministers now work on the earth—not as in the waters of unbelief, proclaiming and speaking through miracles and sacraments and mystical words, where ignorance, the mother of wonder, is made attentive through fear of hidden signs (for such is the way into faith for the children of Adam who have forgotten you, while they hide themselves from your face and become an abyss)—but let them work also as on the dry land, separated from the whirlpools of the abyss, and let them be a pattern for the faithful, living before them and rousing them to imitation. For in this way they hear not only so as to listen but also so as to act: "Seek God, and your soul will live," so that the earth may bring forth a living soul; "Do not be conformed to this world; restrain yourselves from it." By avoiding, the soul lives; by craving, it dies.[33] Restrain yourselves from the monstrous savagery of pride, from the sluggish pleasure of indulgence, and from what is falsely called knowledge, so that the wild beasts may be tamed, the cattle broken in, and the serpents harmless. For these are, in allegory, the movements of the soul; but the haughtiness of pride, the delight of lust, and the poison of curiosity are movements of a dead soul. For it does not die in such a way that it lacks all movement; it dies by departing

31 Psalm 23:5. The fish was an early Christian symbol of Christ; the table is the Eucharist.
32 1 Timothy 5:6.
33 Psalm 69:32.

from the fountain of life, and so it is taken up by the passing world and conformed to it.[34]

13.21.31 But your Word, God, is the fountain of eternal life, and it does not pass away. So in your Word that departure is checked, when it is said to us, "Do not be conformed to this world," so that the earth, in the fountain of life, may bring forth a living soul: in your Word, through your evangelists, a self-restrained soul, by imitating the imitators of your Christ. For this is what "according to its kind" means, since a man is moved to emulation by his friend: "Be as I am," he says, "for I also am as you are." So in the living soul there will be good beasts, in gentleness of conduct.[35] For you have commanded, saying, "Do your works in gentleness, and you will be loved by everyone." And there will be good cattle, neither having too much if they eat nor lacking if they do not eat; and good serpents, not deadly to harm but shrewd to beware, exploring the temporal world only so far as is enough for eternity to be seen, understood through the things that have been made. For these animals serve reason when, restrained from their deadly advance, they live and are good.[36]

THE IMAGE OF GOD RENEWED

Augustine reads the making of humankind in God's image as the renewal of the mind.

13.22.32 For see, Lord our God, our Creator: when our affections have been restrained from love of the world—the affections by which we were dying through living badly—and the soul has begun to be a living soul through living well, and your word has been fulfilled which you spoke through your apostle, "Do not be conformed to this world," there will follow also what you added at once, saying, "but be reformed in the newness of the spirit of your mind"—no longer according to kind, as though imitating a neighbor who goes before us, nor living by the authority of a

34 1 Timothy 6:20.
35 Ecclesiastes 4:4; Galatians 4:12.
36 Sirach 3:17; Matthew 10:16.

better human being. For you did not say, "Let humankind be made according to its kind," but, "Let us make humankind in our image and likeness," so that we may test what your will is.[37] For this is why that steward of yours, begetting children through the gospel, so as not always to have little ones whom he must feed with milk and cherish like a nurse, says, "Be reformed in the newness of your mind, so that you may test what the will of God is, what is good and pleasing and perfect." And so you do not say, "Let humankind be made," but, "Let us make"; nor do you say, "according to his kind," but, "in our image and likeness." For one who is renewed in mind, and beholds your truth once he has understood it, does not need a human being to show him the way, so as to imitate his own kind; but with you showing him, he himself tests what your will is, what is good and pleasing and perfect; and, now that he is capable of it, you teach him to see the Trinity of the Unity, or the Unity of the Trinity.[38] That is why, after the plural "Let us make humankind," it continues in the singular, "and God made humankind"; and after the plural "in our image," it continues in the singular, "in the image of God." So a human being is renewed in the knowledge of God according to the image of the one who created him, and, having become spiritual, he judges all things—all, that is, that ought to be judged—but is himself judged by no one.

13.23.33 His judging all things means that he has authority over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky, over all cattle and wild beasts, over all the earth and all creeping things that creep upon the earth. He does this through the understanding of the mind, by which he perceives the things that are of the Spirit of God. Otherwise, man, though set in honor, did not understand; he was compared to the senseless beasts and became like them. So in your church, our God, according to the grace you have given it—since we are your handiwork, created for good works—there are not only those who preside spiritually but also those who are spiritually subject to those who preside. (For this is how

37 Genesis 1:26.
38 1 Corinthians 4:15; 1 Thessalonians 2:7.

you made humankind male and female in your spiritual grace, where, as regards bodily sex, there is neither male nor female, because there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free.) The spiritual, then, whether they preside or obey, judge spiritually. They do not judge the spiritual knowledge that shines in the firmament, for it is not fitting to pass judgment on so lofty an authority; nor do they judge your book itself, even if something in it does not shine clearly, since we submit our understanding to it and hold it as certain that even what is closed to our sight is rightly and truly said. (For so a human being, though already spiritual and renewed in the knowledge of God according to the image of the one who created him, must still be a doer of the law, not its judge.) Nor does the spiritual person judge that distinction between spiritual and carnal people, who are known to your eyes, our God, but have not yet shown themselves to us by any works, so that we might know them by their fruits; but you, Lord, already know them, and you divided them and called them in secret before the firmament was made. Nor does the spiritual person, though he judges, judge the turbulent peoples of this world—for what business has he judging those outside, when he does not know which of them will come from there into the sweetness of your grace, and which will remain in the everlasting bitterness of ungodliness?

13.23.34 And so the human being whom you made in your image did not receive authority over the lights of heaven, nor over that hidden heaven itself, nor over day and night, which you named before the founding of the sky, nor over the gathering of the waters, which is the sea. What he received was authority over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky, over all cattle and all the earth and all creeping things that creep upon the earth. For he judges, approving what he finds right and disapproving what he finds wrong. He does so in the solemn celebration of the sacraments by which those whom your mercy seeks out in the many waters are initiated; in the celebration in which that Fish is set forth which was raised from the deep and which the devout earth eats; and in the signs and sounds of words that are

subject to the authority of your book, flitting as it were beneath the firmament—interpreting, expounding, discussing, debating, blessing and calling upon you—signs that burst from the mouth and resound, so that the people may answer, "Amen." The reason all these words must be uttered bodily is the abyss of this world and the blindness of the flesh, which cannot see thoughts, so that they have to be sounded into the ears. So, although the birds multiply upon the earth, they still take their origin from the waters.[39] The spiritual person also judges, approving what he finds right and disapproving what he finds wrong, in the works and ways of life of the faithful: in their almsgiving, which is like the fruitful earth; in the living soul, whose passions have been tamed; in chastity, in fasting, in devout thoughts about the things perceived through the bodily senses. For he is now said to judge those things which he also has the power to correct.

INCREASE AND MULTIPLY

Augustine interprets "increase and multiply" as the multiplying of signs and meanings in Scripture.

13.24.35 But what is this, and what kind of mystery? See, Lord, you bless human beings, that they may increase and multiply and fill the earth. Are you not hinting something to us by this, so that we may understand something? Why did you not bless in this way the light, which you called day, nor the firmament of heaven, nor the lights, nor the stars, nor the earth, nor the sea? I would say, our God, who created us in your image—I would say that you willed to bestow this gift of blessing on humankind alone, had you not blessed the fish and the whales in the same way, that they might increase and multiply and fill the waters of the sea, and that the birds might multiply upon the earth. Again, I would say that this blessing belongs to those kinds of things that propagate by generating from themselves, if I found it given to trees and shrubs and to the animals of the earth. But as it is, "Increase and multiply" was said neither to plants and trees nor

39 The Fish: an early Christian symbol of Christ, here received in the Eucharist.

to beasts and serpents, although all these too, like fish and birds and human beings, increase by generation and preserve their kind.[40]

13.24.36 What then shall I say, my light, my truth? That this is empty, that it was said this way to no purpose? Not at all, Father of loving-kindness; far be it from the servant of your Word to say that. And if I do not understand what you mean by this utterance, let better people make better use of it—that is, people of more understanding than I—each as far as you have given them to be wise. But may my confession too be pleasing in your eyes, in which I confess to you that I believe, Lord, you did not speak this way in vain; nor will I keep silent about what the occasion of this reading suggests to me. For it is true, and I do not see what prevents me from understanding the figurative sayings of your books in this way. For I know that what is understood in one way by the mind can be signified in many ways through the body, and that what is signified in one way through the body can be understood in many ways by the mind. Consider the simple love of God and neighbor: in how many sacraments, in how countless languages, and in each language in how countless turns of phrase it is expressed bodily! That is how the offspring of the waters increase and multiply. Pay attention again, whoever you are who read this: here is something that Scripture offers, and the voice sounds out, in one way—"In the beginning God made heaven and earth." Is it not understood in many ways, not through the deceptions of error, but through different kinds of true understanding? That is how the offspring of human beings increase and multiply.

13.24.37 So if we think of the natures of things themselves, not allegorically but literally, the words "increase and multiply" apply to everything that is generated from seed. But if we treat these words as set down figuratively (which I think is rather what Scripture intended, since it surely does not assign this blessing only to the offspring of water creatures and of human beings without reason), then we do find multitudes elsewhere

40 Genesis 1:28.

too: in creatures spiritual and bodily, as in heaven and earth; in souls just and unjust, as in light and darkness; in the holy authors through whom the law was delivered, as in the firmament made firm between water and water; in the society of embittered peoples, as in the sea; in the zeal of devout souls, as in the dry land; in works of mercy in this present life, as in seed-bearing plants and fruit-bearing trees; in spiritual gifts made manifest for the common good, as in the lights of heaven; and in passions shaped toward self-control, as in the living soul. In all these we find multitudes, abundance and growth. But the kind of increase and multiplication in which one thing is expressed in many ways, and one expression understood in many ways, we find only in signs given out bodily and in things thought out by the intellect. By the generations of the waters we have understood signs given out bodily, made necessary by our deep immersion in the flesh; by human generations, things thought out by the intellect, because of the fertility of reason. And so we have believed that to each of these two kinds you said, Lord, "Increase and multiply." For in this blessing I take it that you have granted us the ability and the power both to express in many ways what we hold understood in one way, and to understand in many ways what we read expressed obscurely in one way. So the waters of the sea are filled, which are stirred only by varied meanings; and so too the earth is filled with human offspring—the earth whose dryness appears in its zeal, and over which reason rules.

13.25.38 I want also to say, Lord my God, what the next passage of your Scripture calls to my mind, and I will say it without fear. For I shall say what is true, with you inspiring me to say what you willed me to say from these words. I do not believe that I speak the truth with anyone but you inspiring me, since you are the truth, and every man is a liar; and so whoever speaks a lie speaks from what is his own. Therefore, to speak the truth, I speak from what is yours. See, you have given us for food every seed-bearing plant that yields seed on the whole earth, and every tree that has in it the fruit of its seed. And not to us alone,

but also to all the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth and the serpents; but to the fish and the great whales you did not give these things. For we were saying that these fruits of the earth signify, and figure allegorically, the works of mercy, which the fruitful earth provides for the needs of this life. Such earth was devout Onesiphorus, to whose house you gave mercy, because he often refreshed your Paul and was not ashamed of his chain. The brothers who supplied his needs from Macedonia did this too, and bore fruit of this kind. But how he grieves over certain trees that did not give him the fruit they owed, when he says: "At my first defense no one stood by me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them." For these things are owed to those who minister rational teaching through their understanding of divine mysteries, and they are owed to them as human beings. They are owed to them also as living souls, who offer themselves as examples to imitate in all self-control.[41] They are owed to them also as birds, because of their blessings, which multiply upon the earth, since their sound has gone out into all the earth.

13.26.39 Those who rejoice in this food are fed by it; those whose god is their belly do not rejoice in it. For in those who provide these things, too, the fruit is not what they give but the spirit in which they give it. So I see plainly what that man who served God and not his own belly rejoices in; I see it, and I rejoice with him wholeheartedly. He had received from the Philippians what they had sent by Epaphroditus; yet I see what it is he rejoices in. And what he rejoices in is what feeds him. For, speaking in truth, he says: "I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you have blossomed again in your concern for me, as you were concerned before, but had grown weary." These people, then, had withered in long weariness and had, as it were, dried up from bearing this fruit of good work; and he rejoices for them, because they have blossomed again, not for himself, because

41 Onesiphorus: a Christian praised by Paul for his help (2 Timothy 1:16–18). The quotation is 2 Timothy 4:16.

they relieved his need.[42] That is why he goes on: "Not that I speak of any want; for I have learned to be content in whatever state I am. I know how to have little, and I know how to have plenty; in everything and in all things I have been schooled, both to be full and to be hungry, both to have plenty and to suffer need. I can do all things in him who strengthens me."

13.26.40 What, then, do you rejoice in, great Paul? What do you rejoice in, what feeds you, you who are renewed in the knowledge of God according to the image of the one who created you, you living soul of such self-control, you winged tongue speaking mysteries? For to such living creatures this food is owed. What is it that feeds you? Joy. Let me hear what follows: "Nevertheless," he says, "you did well in sharing my affliction." This is what he rejoices in, this is what feeds him: that they did well, not that his hardship was relieved—he who says to you, "In affliction you have made room for me," because he knows how both to have plenty and to suffer need in you, who strengthen him.[43] "For you yourselves know, Philippians," he says, "that in the beginning of the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent once and again for my needs." Now he rejoices that they have returned to these good works, and is glad that they have blossomed again, like a field whose fertility comes back to life.[44]

13.26.41 Is it for his own needs—since he said, "you sent for my needs"—is that why he rejoices? It is not. And how do we know this? Because he himself goes on to say, "Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit." I have learned from you, my God, to distinguish between gift and fruit. The gift is the thing itself that someone gives when sharing these necessities: money, food, drink, clothing, shelter, help. The fruit, however, is the good and upright will of the giver. For the good Teacher did not say only,

42 Epaphroditus: a Philippian Christian who brought their gift to Paul. The quotation is Philippians 4:10.
43 Philippians 4:14.
44 Philippians 4:15–16.

"whoever receives a prophet," but added, "in the name of a prophet"; nor did he say only, "whoever receives a righteous man," but added, "in the name of a righteous man." For so the one will receive a prophet's reward, and the other a righteous man's reward.[45] Nor did he say only, "whoever gives one of my least ones a cup of cold water to drink," but added, "only in the name of a disciple," and so went on, "Truly I tell you, he will not lose his reward." The gift is to receive a prophet, to receive a righteous man, to hand a cup of cold water to a disciple; but the fruit is to do this in the name of a prophet, in the name of a righteous man, in the name of a disciple. Elijah was fed with fruit by the widow, who knew that she was feeding a man of God and fed him for that reason; but by the raven he was fed with a gift. And it was not the inner Elijah who was fed that way but the one who could also have perished for lack of such food.[46]

13.27.42 And so I will say what is true before you, Lord. When unlearned people and unbelievers—for whose initiation and winning over the sacraments of initiation and great wonders and miracles are necessary, which we believe are signified by the name of fish and whales—take in your servants to refresh them bodily or to help them in some need of this present life, yet do not know why this should be done or what it is for, then neither do the former feed the latter, nor are the latter fed by the former. For the former do not do these things with a holy and upright will, and the latter do not rejoice in their gifts, since they do not yet see any fruit in them. For the mind is fed by what it rejoices in. And that is why fish and whales do not eat the food that only the earth brings forth, once it has been separated and set apart from the bitterness of the sea's waves.

45 Philippians 4:17; Matthew 10:41.

46 Matthew 10:42. Elijah was fed by ravens and then by a widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17).

ALL VERY GOOD

Augustine praises creation as very good and rejects the Manichees' view that parts are evil.

13.28.43 And you saw, God, all that you had made, and behold, it was very good; for we too see them, and behold, all things are very good. In each kind of your works, when you had said that they should be made and they were made, you saw this one and that one, that it was good. I have counted seven times that it is written that you saw that what you made was good; and this is the eighth, that you saw all that you had made, and behold, it was not only good but very good, taken all together. For individually they were only good, but all together they were both good and very good. Every beautiful body says this too: a body made up of members that are all beautiful is far more beautiful than the individual members, by whose perfectly ordered union the whole is completed, even though they too are beautiful individually.

13.29.44 And I looked closely to find whether it was seven or eight times that you saw that your works were good, when they pleased you; and in your seeing I found no times by which I could understand that you saw what you had made so many times. And I said, "Lord, is not this Scripture of yours true, since you, who are truthful and Truth itself, gave it forth? Why then do you tell me that there are no times in your seeing, while this Scripture of yours tells me that day by day you saw that what you had made was good, and when I counted them, I found how many times?" To this you say to me—for you are my God, and you speak with a strong voice in the inner ear of your servant, breaking through my deafness and crying out: "O human being, what my Scripture says, I say. And yet it speaks in time, whereas time does not touch my Word, because my Word stands in an eternity equal with mine. So what you see through my Spirit, I see, just as what you say through my Spirit, I say. And so, while

you see these things in time, I do not see them in time, just as, while you say them in time, I do not say them in time."

13.30.45 And I heard, Lord my God, and I licked up a drop of sweetness from your truth, and I understood that there are some who are displeased with your works. They say that you made many of them under the compulsion of necessity, such as the structures of the heavens and the arrangements of the stars. These, they say, you did not make from what is yours; they had already been created elsewhere and from some other source, and you drew them together, fitted them and wove them into one when you were building the walls of the world out of your defeated enemies, so that, bound fast by that construction, they could not rebel against you again. Other things, they say, you neither made nor even put together—all flesh, all the tiniest living creatures, and whatever holds the earth by its roots—but a hostile mind, another nature not founded by you and opposed to you, generates and forms these things in the lower regions of the world.[47] Those who say these things are out of their minds, because they do not see your works through your Spirit, nor recognize you in them.

13.31.46 But those who see them through your Spirit—you see in them. So when they see that things are good, you see that they are good; and whatever pleases for your sake, it is you who please in it; and what pleases us through your Spirit pleases you in us. For what human being knows the things of a human being except the human spirit that is within? So too no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. "But we," he says, "have received not the spirit of this world but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may know the things given to us by God." And I am prompted to say: "Surely no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.[48] How, then, do we too know the things given to us by God?" The answer comes to me that the things we know through his Spirit are, even so, known by no one but the

47 Augustine means the Manichees, who taught that the world was built from the defeated powers of darkness.

48 1 Corinthians 2:11–12.

Spirit of God. For just as it was rightly said, "It is not you who speak," to those who were to speak in the Spirit of God, so it is rightly said, "It is not you who know," to those who know in the Spirit of God. No less rightly, then, is it said, "It is not you who see," to those who see in the Spirit of God. So whatever they see in the Spirit of God to be good, it is not they but God who sees that it is good.[49] It is one thing, then, for someone to think that what is good is evil, like the people spoken of above. It is another for a person to see that what is good is good, as your creation pleases many because it is good, and yet you do not please them in it, so that they would rather enjoy it than you. And it is another again when a person sees that something is good and God sees in him that it is good—so that God is loved in what he has made, he who could not be loved except through the Spirit he has given, since the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. Through him we see that whatever exists in any way is good; for it comes from him who does not exist in some particular way, but is: simply is.

13.32.47 Thanks be to you, Lord! We see heaven and earth—whether the higher and lower parts of the bodily world, or spiritual and bodily creation—and in the adornment of these parts, of which either the whole mass of the world or the whole of creation consists, we see light made and divided from the darkness. We see the firmament of heaven: whether the first body of the world, between the spiritual waters above and the bodily waters below, or this expanse of air—for this too is called heaven—through which the birds of heaven wander between the waters that float above it as vapor and fall as dew even on clear nights, and the heavy waters that flow upon the earth. We see the beauty of the gathered waters across the plains of the sea, and the dry land, whether bare or given form so as to be visible and ordered, the mother of plants and trees. We see the lights shining from above: the sun sufficing for the day, the moon and stars cheering the night, and all of them marking and signifying the

49 Matthew 10:20.

times. We see the moist element everywhere made fertile with fish and sea monsters and birds, because the thickness of the air that bears up the flight of birds is condensed from the exhalation of the waters. We see the face of the earth adorned with land animals, and the human being, made in your image and likeness, set above all irrational living things by that very image and likeness of yours—that is, by the power of reason and understanding. And just as in his soul there is one part that rules by taking counsel and another that is subject so as to obey, so for the man a woman too was made, bodily. In her mind she would have an equal nature of rational understanding, yet in her bodily sex she would be subject to the male sex, just as the impulse to action is subject to the mind's reason, so as to conceive from it the skill of acting rightly. We see these things, and each of them is good, and all of them together very good.

13.33.48 Your works praise you so that we may love you, and we love you so that your works may praise you. They have a beginning and an end in time, a rising and a setting, a growing and a waning, form and privation. So they have, in succession, morning and evening, partly hidden, partly evident. For they were made by you from nothing, not from you—not from some matter that was not yours, or that existed before, but from matter created along with them, that is, created by you at the same time, because you gave form to its formlessness without any interval of time. For while the matter of heaven and earth is one thing and the form of heaven and earth another, you made the matter from absolutely nothing and the form of the world from formless matter; yet you made both at once, so that form followed matter with no gap of delay.

13.34.49 We have also looked into what you willed to figure by having these things made, or written, in such an order; and we have seen that each thing is good and all things together are very good in your Word, in your only Son: heaven and earth, the head and the body of the church, in predestination before all time, without morning and evening. But then you began to carry out in time what you had predestined, to make manifest what

was hidden and to bring order to our disorder—for our sins were over us, and we had gone away from you into the dark deep, and your good Spirit was borne above, to come to our help at the right time. You justified the ungodly and distinguished them from the wicked; you made firm the authority of your book between those above, who would be teachable by you, and those below, who would be subject to it; and you gathered the society of unbelievers into one conspiracy, so that the zeal of the faithful might appear and bring forth for you works of mercy, even distributing their earthly means to the poor to acquire heavenly things. And then you kindled certain lights in the firmament: your saints, holding the word of life and shining with a lofty authority raised high by spiritual gifts. And then, to instruct the unbelieving nations, you brought forth from bodily matter the sacraments and visible miracles and the sounds of words, in keeping with the firmament of your book, by which the faithful too might be blessed. After that you formed the living soul of the faithful through passions set in order by the strength of self-control. And then you renewed in your image and likeness the mind subject to you alone, needing no human authority to imitate; and you made rational action subject to the surpassing intellect, as woman to man. And you willed that, for all your ministers who are needed to bring the faithful to perfection in this life, those same faithful should provide, for their temporal needs, works that will bear fruit in the future. All these things we see, and they are very good, because you see them in us—you who have given us the Spirit by which we might see them and love you in them.

THE SEVENTH DAY

Augustine closes by praying for the peace of the seventh day, the eternal Sabbath rest.

13.35.50 Lord God, give us peace—for you have given us all things—the peace of rest, the peace of the Sabbath, the peace without evening. For this whole most beautiful order of very good

things, once its measures have run their course, is going to pass away: for in them too there was morning and there was evening.

13.36.51 But the seventh day is without evening and has no setting, because you sanctified it to endure forever. You rested on the seventh day after your very good works, though you made them while remaining at rest; and the voice of your book tells us this beforehand, so that we too, after our works—which are very good because you gave them to us—may rest in you in the Sabbath of eternal life.

13.37.52 For then too you will rest in us, just as now you work in us; and that rest of yours will be through us, just as these works of yours are through us. But you, Lord, are always working and always at rest. You do not see in time, nor are you moved in time, nor do you rest in time; and yet you make the seeing of things in time, and time itself, and the rest that comes after time.

13.38.53 So we see these things that you have made because they exist; but they exist because you see them. And we see outwardly that they exist, and inwardly that they are good; but you saw them made in the very place where you saw that they were to be made. And we, at a later time, were moved to do good, after our heart had conceived from your Spirit; at an earlier time we were moved to do evil, forsaking you. But you, God, the one Good, have never ceased to do good. And there are some good works of ours, given by your gift, but they are not everlasting; after them we hope to rest in your great holiness. But you, the Good that needs no other good, are always at rest, because your rest is you yourself. And what human being will give another human being the understanding of this? What angel will give it to an angel? What angel to a human being? Let it be asked of you, sought in you, knocked for at your door: so, only so, will it be received, so will it be found, so will it be opened.