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

Part I – Books
Volume 1:
The Confessions

THE WORKS OF SAINT AUGUSTINE
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the Confessions

I/1

introduction, translation and notes
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BOOK II

Adolescence

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

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

4. But I was far too impetuous, poor wretch, so I went with the flood-tide of my nature and abandoned you. I swept across all your laws,¹²

4. See Is 42:14.

5. See Gn 1:28.

6. See Gn 3:18.

7. Augustine frequently uses clouds as a symbol of the preachers of God's word, who produce the thunder of his threats and the rain that gives life. In the present text the reference is to the scriptural words themselves.

8. 1 Cor 7:28.

9. 1 Cor 7:1.

10. 1 Cor 7:32-33.

11. See Mt 19:12.

12. See Lv 10:11.

Sexual awakening

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

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

1. The image of God in man is "corrupted" by sin; Book II recounts this process in Augustine's adolescence. It is refashioned by God's saving work, as he confesses at XIII, 34, 49.

2. The sweet Spirit of love is contrasted with the bitterness of his recollected sins, as Augustine embarks on the history of his disordered loves. In the following sentence the contrast between unity and multiplicity is reminiscent of Porphyry.

3. See 1 Jn 2:16.

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

A year at home

3. 5. In that same year, my sixteenth, my studies were interrupted and I was brought back from Madaura, a nearby city where I had been lodging for instruction in literature and rhetoric. The reason for this was that my father was saving up to send me further afield, to Carthage, though it was his shameless ambition that suggested the plan, not his wealth, for he was no more than a fairly obscure town councillor at Thagaste. But to whom am I telling this story? Not to you, my God; rather in your presence I am relating these events to my own kin, the human race, however few of them may chance upon these writings of mine. And why? So that whoever reads them may reflect with me on the depths from which we must cry to you.¹⁶ What finds a readier hearing with you than a heart that confesses to you, a life lived from faith?¹⁷

At the time I speak of anyone would have heaped praise upon my father, a man prepared to go beyond his means in spending as much money as was needed to send his son away to study, even in a distant city. No such efforts were made on behalf of the children of many other

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

14. See Hos 6:2.

15. See Lk 15:13.

16. See Ps 129(130):1.

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

citizens who were far richer; yet all the while this same father of mine was unconcerned about how I would grow up for you, and cared little that I should be chaste, provided I was intellectually cultivated. It would be truer to say that I was left fallow¹⁸ of your cultivation, O God, who are the only true and good owner of your field, my heart.¹⁹

6. Owing to the state of family finances in this sixteenth year of my life there was an interval of leisure for me, during which, being free from all schooling, I began to spend time in my parents' company. The thorn-bushes of my lust shot up higher than my head, and no hand was there to root them out. Least of all my father's; for when at the baths one day he saw me with unquiet adolescence my only covering,²⁰ and noted my ripening sexuality, he began at once to look forward eagerly to grandchildren, and gleefully announced his discovery to my mother. His glee sprang from that intoxication which has blotted you, our creator, out of this world's memory and led it to love the creature instead,²¹ as it drinks the unseen wine of its perverse inclination and is dragged down to the depths. In my mother's soul, however, you had already begun to build your temple and prepare for your holy indwelling,²² whereas my father was still a catechumen, and a recent one at that. She therefore started up in devout fear and trembling, for she was afraid for me even though I was not yet a Christian. She saw the twisted paths I followed, those paths trodden by people who turn their backs to you, not their faces.²³

Adolescent lust

7. Alas for me! Do I dare to say that you were silent, my God, when I was straying from you? Were you really silent to me at that time? Whose, then, were the words spoken to me by my mother, your faithful follower? Were they not your words, the song you were constantly

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

19. See Mt 13:24-30.

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

21. See Rom 1:25.

22. See 1 Cor 3:16-17.

23. See Jer 2:27.

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

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

24. See Ps 115(116):16.

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

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

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

28. See Jer 51:6.

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

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

He robs a pear tree

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

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

29. See Ps 72(73):7.

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

31. See Rom 2:14-15.

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

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

Question of motives

5. 10. The beautiful form of material things attracts our eyes, so we are drawn to gold, silver and the like. We are powerfully influenced by the feel of things agreeable³³ to the touch; and each of our other senses finds some quality that appeals to it individually in the variety of material objects. There is the same appeal in worldly rank, and the possibility it offers of commanding and dominating other people: this too holds its attraction, and often provides an opportunity for settling old scores. We may seek all these things, O Lord, but in seeking them we must not deviate from your law. The life we live here is open to temptation by reason of a certain measure and harmony between its own splendor and all these beautiful things of low degree. Again, the friendship which draws human beings together in a tender bond is sweet to us because out of many minds it forges a unity.³⁴ Sin gains entrance through these and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

36. Sallust, *Cat.* 16.3. Augustine will name Catiline at the end of the paragraph.

37. *Ibid.* 5.5.

38. *Ibid.* 5.7.

a theft. Are you really anything at all, for me to be speaking to you like this?

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

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

39. See 2 Mc 1:24; Ambrose, *Hymn* 1.2.

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

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

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

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

7. 15. How can I repay the Lord⁴⁶ for my ability to recall these things

41. See Rom 8:35.

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

43. See Ps 72(73):27.

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

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

46. See Ps 115(116):12.

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

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

8. 16. What fruit did I ever reap from those things which I now blush to remember,⁴⁹ and especially from that theft in which I found nothing to love save the theft itself, wretch that I was? It was nothing, and by the very act of committing it I became more wretched still. And yet, as I recall my state of mind at the time, I would not have done it alone; I most certainly would not have done it alone. It follows, then, that I also loved the camaraderie with my fellow-thieves. So it is not true to say that I loved nothing other than the theft? Ah, but it is true, because that gang-mentality too was a nothing. What was it in fact? Who can teach me, except the One who illumines my heart⁵⁰ and distinguishes between its shadows? Why has this question come into my mind now, to be examined and discussed and considered? If the object of my love had

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

48. See Sir 3:17.

49. See Rom 6:21.

50. See Sir 2:10.

been the pears I stole, and I simply wanted to enjoy them, I could have done it alone; similarly, if the act of committing the sin had sufficed by itself to yield me the pleasure I sought, I would not have further inflamed my itching desire by the stimulation of conspiracy. But since my pleasure did not lie in the pears, it must have been in the crime as committed in the company of others who shared in the sin.

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

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

The prodigal's wanderings begin

10. 18. Who can unravel this most snarled, knotty tangle? It is disgusting, and I do not want to look at it or see it. O justice and innocence, fair and lovely, it is on you that I want to gaze with eyes that see purely and find satiety in never being sated. With you is rest and tranquil life.

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

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

Whoever enters into you enters the joy of his Lord;⁵³ there he will fear nothing and find his own supreme good in God who is supreme goodness. I slid away from you and wandered away, my God; far from your steadfastness I strayed in adolescence, and I became to myself a land of famine.⁵⁴

⁵³. See Mt 25:21.

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

BOOK III

Student Years at Carthage

Student life: sex and shon

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

1. The city was very prosperous when Augustine arrived there in his seventeenth year, and had for more than a century rivaled Alexandria in its claim to be the second city of the empire. Christianity had taken root there early, but paganism was still strong.

2. The reference may be to Job (Jb 2:7-8), but Lazarus is probably in mind too (Lk 16:20).

3. See Ps 58:18(59:17).

BOOK VII

Neo-Platonism Frees Augustine's Mind

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

Materialistic notions of God insufficient

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

1. *Inventus* is associated in his mind with Milan. *Adulescentia* had lasted from 15 to 30.

2. See Jn 17:3.

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

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

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

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

4. See Virgil: *Aen.* 3.233, of the Harpies who harassed the Trojan refugees.

5. See 1 Cor 15:52

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

out of the difficulty. Yet you allowed no flood of thoughts to sweep me away from the faith whereby I believed that you exist, that your essence is unchangeable, that you care for us humans and judge our deeds, and that in your Son, Christ our Lord, and in the holy scriptures which the authority of your Catholic Church guarantees, you have laid down the way for human beings to reach that eternal life²³ which awaits us after death. These beliefs were unaffected, and persisted strong and unshaken in me as I feverishly searched for the origin of evil.

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

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

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

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

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

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

outward they crowded upon me thick and fast; when I tried to think the images of these material things blocked my path of return, as though demanding, "Where are you off to, you unworthy, degraded fellow?"

All this had sprung from my wounded condition, for you humbled this proud man with a wounding blow.²⁸ My swollen pride got in the way and kept me from you, and my face was so puffy that my eyes were closed.

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

He reads "the books of the Platonists"

9. 13. You wanted to show me first and foremost how you thwart the proud but give grace to the humble,³⁷ and with what immense mercy on your part the way of humility was demonstrated to us when your Word was made flesh and dwelt among men and women;³⁸ and so through a certain man grossly swollen with pride you provided me³⁹ with some books by the Platonists, translated from the Greek into Latin.⁴⁰ In them

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

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

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

31. See Jb 42:6 (Old Latin); Sir 17:31.

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

33. See X, 27, 38; 1, 7, 12, the special work of the Second Person of the Trinity.

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

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

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

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

38. See Jn 1:14.

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

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

I read (not that the same words were used, but precisely the same doctrine was taught, buttressed by many and various arguments) that *in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God; he was God. He was with God in the beginning. Everything was made through him; nothing came to be without him. What was made is alive with his life, and that life was the light of humankind. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never been able to master it; and that the human soul, even though it bears testimony about the Light, is not itself the Light, but that God, the Word, is the true Light, which illumines every human person who comes into this world; and that he was in this world, a world made by him, but the world did not know him. But that he came to his own home, and his own people did not receive him; but to those who did receive him he gave power to become children of God: to those, that is, who believe in his name*⁴¹—none of this did I read there.

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

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

41. Jn 1:1-12.

42. See Jn 1:13.

43. Jn 1:14.

44. Phil 2:6-11.

45. Jn 1:16.

46. See Wis 7:27.

wise;⁴⁷ but that *at the time of our weakness he died for the wicked*,⁴⁸ and that you did not spare even your only Son, but delivered him up for us all,⁴⁹ these things are not to be found there. For you have *hidden these matters from the sagacious and shrewd, and revealed them to little ones*,⁵⁰ so that those who toil under heavy burdens may come to him and he may give them relief, because he is gentle and humble of heart.⁵¹ He will guide the gentle aright and teach the unassuming his ways,⁵² for he sees our lowly estate and our labor, and forgives all our sins.⁵³ As for those who are raised on the stilts of their loftier doctrine, too high to hear him calling, *Learn of me, for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you shall find rest for your souls*,⁵⁴ even if they know God, they do not honor him as God or give him thanks; their thinking has been frittered away into futility and their foolish hearts are benighted, for in claiming to be wise they have become stupid.⁵⁵

15. In consequence what I also read there was the story of their exchanging your glorious, imperishable nature for idols and a variety of man-made things, for the effigy of a perishable human or of birds or animals or crawling creatures;⁵⁶ these are the food of the Egyptians, for the sake of which Esau bartered away his dignity as the first-born,⁵⁷ just as your first-born people turned back to Egypt in their hearts,⁵⁸ worship-

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

48. Rom 5:6.

49. See Rom 8:32.

50. Mt 11:25.

51. See Mt 11:28.

52. See Ps 24(25):9.

53. See Ps 24(25):18.

54. Mt 11:29.

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

56. See Rom 1:23.

57. See Gn 25:33-34. For Christian writers Egypt traditionally represented the home *par excellence* of idolatry, partly because of the highly developed worship system of ancient Egypt, and partly because of Egypt's special place in the history of the chosen people. In his *Expositions of the Psalms* 46.6 Augustine explains that lentils are "the food of the Egyptians" because grown abundantly there. In the present text Esau's choice to forgo his rights as first-born is seen as prefiguring the choice of the "first-born people."

58. See Acts 7:39.

ing a beast's head instead of you,⁵⁹ and abasing their souls, made in your image, before the image of a calf munching hay.⁶⁰

These things I found there, but I did not eat that food; for it was pleasing in your sight, Lord, to take away from Jacob the shame of his subordination and cause the elder to serve the younger,⁶¹ so you called the Gentiles into your inheritance. And I had come to you from the Gentiles. I set my heart upon the gold which at your bidding your people had brought out of Egypt, because wherever it was, it belonged to you.⁶² So you told the Athenians through your apostle that in you we live and move and have our being, and that indeed some of their own authorities had said this,⁶³ and unquestionably those books I read came from there.⁶⁴ I disregarded the idols of the Egyptians, to which they paid homage with gold that belonged to you, for they perverted the truth of God into a lie, worshipping a creature and serving it rather than the creator.⁶⁵

He attempts Platonic ecstasy, but is "beaten back"

10. 16. Warned by these writings that I must return to myself,⁶⁶ I entered under your guidance the innermost places of my being; but only because you had become my helper⁶⁷ was I able to do so. I entered, then, and with the vision of my spirit, such as it was, I saw the incommutable light⁶⁸ far above my spiritual ken, transcending my mind: not this common light which every carnal eye can see, nor any light of the same order but greater, as

59. See Ex 32:1-6.

60. See Ps 105(106):20.

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

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

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

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

65. See Rom 1:25.

66. Plotinus' advice for self-purification as a preparation for the soul's ascent, *Enn.* 1.6.9; see V, 1, 1; V, 3, 4-5. But the phrase also recalls the prodigal son, Lk 15:17.

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

68. See Jn 1:9.

though this common light were shining much more powerfully, far more brightly, and so extensively as to fill the universe. The light I saw was not this common light at all, but something different, utterly different, from all these things. Nor was it higher than my mind in the sense that oil floats on water or the sky is above the earth; it was exalted because this very light made me, and I was below it because by it I was made. Anyone who knows truth knows it, and whoever knows it knows eternity.⁶⁹ Love knows it.

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

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

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

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

71. See Ps 26(27):10.

72. The formula is from Plotinus, *Enn.* 1.8.13, who derived it from Plato's "bottomless sea of unlikeness," *Politicus* 273 D6-E1. But Lk 15:13 is perhaps equally in Augustine's mind. In his *Expositions of the Psalms* 99, 5 Augustine says, "In your unlikeness to God you have gone far from him; as you become like him you draw near." The idea that distance from God is equivalent to unlikeness became very influential and recurs in many Christian writers and mystics.

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

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

75. Ex 3:14.

New light on the problem of evil

11, 17. Contemplating other things below you, I saw that they do not in the fullest sense exist, nor yet are they completely non-beings: they are real because they are from you, but unreal inasmuch as they are not what you are. For that alone truly is, which abides unchangingly. As for me, my good is to hold fast to God,⁷⁶ for if I do not abide in him, I shall not be able to in myself; whereas he, abiding ever in himself, renews all things.⁷⁷ You are my Lord, for you need no goods of mine.⁷⁸

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

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

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

76. See Ps 72(73):28.

77. See Wis 7:27.

78. See Ps 15(16):2.

79. See Plotinus, *Enn.* 3.2.5.

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

13, 19. For you evil has no being at all, and this is true not of yourself only but of everything you have created, since apart from you there is nothing that could burst in and disrupt the order you have imposed on it. In some parts of it certain things are regarded as evil because they do not suit certain others; but these same things do fit in elsewhere, and they are good there, and good in themselves. All these things that are at odds with each other belong to the lower part of creation that we call earth, which has its own cloudy, windy sky, as befits it. Far be it from me ever to say, "These things ought not to be"; because even if I could see these things alone, and longed, certainly, for something better, it would already be incumbent on me to praise you for them alone; for on earth the dragons and all the depths proclaim you worthy of praise, as do the fire, hail, snow, ice and stormy winds that obey your word, the mountains and hills, fruit-bearing trees and all cedars, wild beasts and tame, creeping creatures and birds on the wing. Earth's kings and all its peoples, rulers and the world's judges, young men and maidens, old men and youths, all praise your name.⁸¹ But since in heaven too your creatures praise you, our God, let all your angels tell your praises on high, let all your powers extol you, sun and moon, all stars and the light, the empyrean and the waters above the heavens: let them too praise your name.⁸² No longer was I hankering for any elements to be better than they were, because I was now keeping the totality in view; and though I certainly esteemed the higher creatures above the lower, a more wholesome judgment showed me that the totality was better than the higher things on their own would have been.

14, 20. There is no wholesomeness⁸³ for those who find fault with anything you have created, as there was none for me when many of the things you have made displeased me. Since my soul did not dare to find my God displeasing, it was unwilling to admit that anything that displeased it was truly yours. This was why it had strayed away into believing in a duality of substances, but there it found no rest, and only mouthed the opinions of others. Turning back again it had made for itself a god extended through infinite space, all-pervasive, and had thought this god was you, and had set him up in its heart;⁸⁴ so it became yet again a

81. See Ps 148:7-12.

82. See Ps 148:1-5.

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

84. See Ez 14:7.

temple for its own idol and an abomination in your sight. But when you cradled my stupid head and closed my eyes to the sight of vain things⁸⁵ so that I could absent me from myself awhile, and my unwholesome madness was lulled to sleep, then I awoke in you and saw you to be infinite, but in a different sense; and that vision in no way derived from the flesh.

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

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

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

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

17, 23. I found it amazing that though I now loved your very self, and not some figment of imagination in place of you, I could not continue steadfastly in the enjoyment of my God. I was drawn toward you by your beauty but swiftly dragged away from you by my own weight, swept back headlong

85. See Ps 118(119):37.

86. See Sir 10:10.

and groaning onto these things below myself; and this weight was carnal habit. Nonetheless the memory of you stayed with me, and I had no doubt whatever whom I ought to cling to, though I knew that I was not yet capable of clinging, because the perishable body weighs down the soul, and its earthly habitation oppresses a mind teeming with thoughts.⁸⁷ I was fully persuaded that your invisible reality is plainly to be understood through created things, your everlasting power also, and your divinity;⁸⁸ for I had been trying to understand how it was possible for me to appreciate the beauty of material things in the sky or on earth, and why the power to make sound judgments about changeable matters was readily available to me, so that I could say, “This thing ought to be like this, but that other different”; and in seeking the reason why I was able to judge as I did I realized that above my changeable mind soared the real, unchangeable truth, which is eternal.⁸⁹

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

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

And then my mind attained to *That Which Is*, in the flash of one tremulous glance.⁹² Then indeed did I perceive your invisible reality through created

87. See Wis 9:15, frequently quoted by Augustine in connection with his image of *pondus*, weight.
88. See Rom 1:20.

89. See Plotinus, *Enn.* 5.1.11, where it is argued that the abiding principles of beauty and goodness cannot be the property of the individual soul as such, since our rational mind is only intermittently aware of them: they must derive from mind, or the divine source of mind, residing in us.

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

91. See Cicero, *Tusc.* 1.6.38.

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

things,⁹³ but to keep my gaze there was beyond my strength. I was forced back through weakness and returned to my familiar surroundings, bearing with me only a loving memory, one that yearned for something of which I had caught the fragrance, but could not yet feast upon.

He realizes the need for Christ the Mediator

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

93. See Rom 1:20.

94. See 1 Tm 2:5.

95. See Rom 9:5.

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

97. See Col 1:16.

98. In 1, 6, 7 the infant Augustine sought from God the milk provided through his nurses; now as a grown man he stands in need of the milk supplied through another infancy, that of the speechless Word, in order to grow strong enough to eat the "food of the mature" mentioned in VII, 10, 16. The reference is primarily to the divine nature, but eucharistic overtones are strong.

99. See Prv 9:1.

100. See Gn 2:7.

101. See 1 Cor 1:25.

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

19. 25. I took a different view at the time, regarding Christ my Lord as no more than a man, though a man of excellent wisdom and without peer. I was the more firmly persuaded of this because he had been born of a virgin and made plain to us by his own example that disdain for temporal goods is a condition for winning immortality; and it seemed to me that through God's solicitude for us in this respect Christ's teaching had acquired incomparable authority. But I could not even begin to guess what a mystery was concealed in the Word made flesh. All I had understood from the facts about him handed down in the scriptures—as, for instance, that he ate, drank, slept, walked, experienced joy and sorrow and spoke to the people—was that his flesh was united to your Word only in conjunction with a human soul and a human consciousness. This must be obvious to anyone who has recognized the immutability of your Word, as I had insofar as I was able, and on this score I had no doubt. It is characteristic of the instability of our soul or mind that it can move its bodily limbs at one moment and not move them at another, can be affected now by some emotion and now again be unaffected, can give expression to wise sentiments at one time and at another remain silent. If these actions were reported of him falsely it would lay the entirety of the scriptures open to suspicion of lying, and then these writings would afford no possibility of saving faith to the human race. In fact, however, the scriptures are trustworthy; and so I acknowledged Christ to be a perfect man: not a human body only, nor a body with a human soul but lacking intelligence. Yet I held that this same man was to be preferred to others not because he was Truth in person, but on account of the outstanding excellence of his human nature and his more perfect participation in wisdom.

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

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

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

Christ the Way

20. 26. But in those days, after reading the books of the Platonists and following their advice to seek for truth beyond corporeal forms, I turned my gaze toward your invisible reality, trying to understand it through created things,¹⁰⁷ and though I was rebuffed I did perceive what that reality was which the darkness of my soul would not permit me to contemplate. I was certain that you exist, that you are infinite but not spread out through space either finite or infinite, and that you exist in the fullest sense because you have always been the same,¹⁰⁸ unvarying in every respect and in no wise subject to change. All other things I saw to have their being from you,¹⁰⁹ and for this I needed but one unassailable proof—the fact that they exist. On these points I was quite certain, but I was far too weak to enjoy you. Yet I readily chattered as though skilled in the subject, and had I not been seeking your way in Christ our Savior¹¹⁰ I would more probably have been killed than skilled.¹¹¹ For I had already begun to covet a reputation for wisdom, and though fully punished I shed no tears of compunction; rather was I complacently puffed up with knowledge. Where was that charity which builds¹¹² on the foundation of humility that is Christ Jesus?¹¹³ And when would those books have taught it to me? I believe that you willed me to

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

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

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

107. See Rom 1:20.

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

109. See Rom 11:36.

110. See Ti 1:4.

111. *Non peritus sed periturus*.

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

113. See 1 Cor 3:11.

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

Augustine discovers Saint Paul

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

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

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

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

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

117. See Ps 2:11.

118. See 1 Cor 4:7.

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

is he to deal with that other law in his bodily members which strives against the law approved by his mind, delivering him as prisoner to the law of sin dominant in his body?¹²⁰ You are just, O Lord;¹²¹ but we have sinned, and done wrong, and acted impiously,¹²² and your hand has lain heavy upon us.¹²³ With good reason were we assigned to that ancient sinner who presides over death,¹²⁴ for he had seduced our will into imitating that perverse will of his by which he refused to stand fast in your truth.¹²⁵

What is a human wretch to do? Who will free him from this death-laden body, if not your grace, given through Jesus Christ our Lord,¹²⁶ whom you have begotten coeternal with yourself and created at the beginning of all your works?¹²⁷ In him the ruler of this world found nothing that deserved death,¹²⁸ yet slew him all the same; and so the record of debt that stood against us was annulled.¹²⁹

None of this is to be found in those other books. Not in those pages are traced the lineaments of such loving kindness, or the tears of confession, or the sacrifice of an anguished spirit offered to you from a contrite and humbled heart,¹³⁰ or the salvation of a people, or a city chosen to be your bride,¹³¹ or the pledge of the Holy Spirit,¹³² or the cup of our ransom. Not there is anyone heard to sing, *Shall not my soul surrender itself to God? For my salvation comes from him. He is my very God, my Savior, my protector, and I shall waver no more.*¹³³ No one there hearkens to a voice calling, *Come to me, all you who struggle.* They are too scornful to learn from him, because he is gentle and humble of heart,¹³⁴ and you have hidden these things from the sagacious and shrewd, and revealed them to little ones.¹³⁵

120. See Rom 7:22-23.

121. See Tb 3:2; Ps 118(119):137.

122. See Dn 3:27,29; 1 Kgs 8:47.

123. See Ps 31(32):4.

124. See Heb 2:14.

125. See Jn 8:44.

126. See Rom 7:24-25.

127. See Prv 8:22. The Arians had appealed to this verb "created" in support of their doctrine of the subordination of the Son; Augustine in common with Athanasius, Ambrose, and others interprets it of Christ's humanity.

128. See Lk 23:14-15; Jn 14:30.

129. See Col 2:14.

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

131. See Rv 21:2.

132. See 2 Cor 5:5; 1:22.

133. Ps 61:2-3(62:1-2).

134. See Mt 11:28-29.

135. See Mt 11:25.

It is one thing to survey our peaceful homeland from a wooded height¹³⁶ but fail to find the way there, and make vain attempts to travel through impassable terrain, while fugitive deserters marshaled by the lion and the dragon¹³⁷ obstruct and lurk in ambush; and quite another to walk steadily in the way that leads there, along the well-built road opened up by the heavenly emperor, where no deserters from the celestial army dare commit robbery, for they avoid that way like torment.

In awe-inspiring ways these truths were striking deep roots within me as I read the least of your apostles;¹³⁸ I had contemplated your works and was filled with dread.¹³⁹

136. As Moses saw the promised land from afar, Dt 32:49.

137. See Ps 90(91):13.

138. See 1 Cor 15:9.

139. See Hab 3:2.

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

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

How foolish are they who know not God! So many good things before their eyes, yet *Him Who Is* they fail to see.¹⁴ I was trapped in that foolishness no longer, for I had left it behind by hearkening to the concerted witness of your whole creation, and had discovered you, our creator, and your Word, who dwells with you and is with you the one sole God, through whom you have created all things.¹⁵ But there are impious people of another type, who do recognize God yet have not glorified him as God, nor given him thanks.¹⁶ Into that error too I had

10. See Mt 13:52.

11. See Ps 25(26):8.

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

13. Mt 19:12.

14. See Wis 13:1.

15. See Jn 1:1-3.

16. See Rom 1:21.

BOOK VIII

Conversion

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

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

You inspired in me the idea that I ought to go to Simplicianus, and even I could see the sense of this. I regarded him as your good servant, a man from whom grace radiated.⁹ Moreover I had heard how from his

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

2. See Ps 34(35):10.

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

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

5. See Is 29:2.

6. See 1 Cor 13:12.

7. See 1 Cor 5:7-8.

8. See Mt 7:14.

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

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

Conversation with Simplicianus

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

Story of Victorinus' conversion

He went on to reminisce about this Victorinus²² with the object of inculcating in me that humility of Christ which is hidden from the sagacious but revealed to little ones.²³ He knew him intimately in Rome, and he told me a story about Victorinus which I will not pass over in silence, since it powerfully redounds to the praise of your grace and moves me to confession, this story of a deeply learned old man.

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

18. Jb 28:28.

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

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

21. See Col 2:8.

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

23. See Mt 11:25.

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

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

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

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

The fact was that he was sorely afraid of upsetting the proud demon-worshippers who were his friends, fearing that the weight of their resent-

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

25. Virgil, *Aen.* 8.698-700.

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

27. See Gal 5:11.

28. See Ps 143(144):5.

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

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

5. Eventually the time came for him to make his profession of faith. Custom decrees that those who are approaching your grace in baptism make their profession in the presence of the baptized community of Rome, standing on a raised platform and using a set form of words which has been entrusted to them and committed to memory.³⁶ Simplicianus told me that Victorinus had been offered by the priests the option of making his statement more privately, for it was customary to offer this

29. For Babylon as a symbol of pride, see Is 14:4, 12, 13; and, identified with pagan Rome, Rv 17:5, 18:2.

30. See Ps 28(29):5.

31. See Mk 8:38 and par.

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

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

34. See Ps 111(112):10.

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

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

concession to people who were likely to lose their nerve through shyness, but that he had chosen rather to proclaim his salvation before the holy company. What he taught in rhetoric was not salvation, he said, yet he had professed that publicly enough. If he was not afraid to address crowds of crazy people in his own words, how much less ought he to fear your peaceable flock as he uttered your word?

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

3. 6. O God, who are so good, what is it in the human heart that makes us rejoice more intensely over the salvation of a soul which is despaired of but then freed from grave danger, than we would if there had always been good prospects for it and its peril slighter? You too, merciful Father, yes, even you are more joyful over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance.³⁷ And we likewise listen with overflowing gladness when we hear how the shepherd carries back on exultant shoulders the sheep that had strayed,³⁸ and how the coin is returned to your treasury as neighbors share the glee of the woman who found it,³⁹ while the joy of your eucharistic assembly wrings tears from us when the story is read in your house of a younger son who was *dead, but has come back to life, was lost but is found*.⁴⁰ You express your own joy through ours, and through the joy of your angels who are made holy by their holy charity; for you yourself are ever the same,⁴¹ and all transient things, things which cannot abide constantly in their mode of being, are known to your unchanging intelligence.

37. See Lk 15:4-7.

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

39. See Lk 15:8-9.

40. Lk 15:24, 32.

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

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

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

8. This law holds for shameful, demeaning pleasure, but the same is true for what is permitted and lawful, the same for the most sincere and honorable friendship, and the same for that young man who had died but come back to life, had perished but was found. In every case greater sorrow issues in greater joy. How can this be, O Lord my God, when you are yourself your own eternal joy, and all around you heaven rejoices in you eternally? Why is it that our part of creation swings between decay and growth, pain and reconciliation? Perhaps because this is the proper mode of being for these things and with this alone you endowed them when from highest heaven to the lowest places of the earth, from the dawn of the ages to their end, from angel to tiny worm, from the first stirring of change to the last, you assigned all classes of good things and all your righteous works to their appropriate places, and activated them at their proper times?

42. See Virgil, *Aen.* 4.644.

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

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

Forbid it, Lord, that rich personages should ever be more welcome in your tabernacle than the poor, or the nobility than lowly folk,⁴⁷ when your own preferential choice fell upon the weak things of this world in order to shame the strong, upon lowly things, contemptible things and nonentities, as though they really were, to set at nought the things that are.⁴⁸ Nevertheless the least of your apostles,⁴⁹ through whose tongue you sent those words re-echoing, loved to be called not by his former name, "Saul," but "Paul," to commemorate that glorious victory when the proconsul Paulus,⁵⁰ his pride beaten down⁵¹ by the apostle's arms, was brought under Christ's lenient yoke to become a common subject of the great King.⁵² The enemy is more thoroughly trounced in a person over

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

44. See Sg 1:2-3.

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

46. See Jn 1:9,12.

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

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

49. See 1 Cor 15:9.

50. See Acts 13:7-12.

51. See Virgil, *Aen.* 6.853.

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

whom he had a more powerful hold, or through whom he had a hold over a greater number of others; and stronger is his grip over those who on pretext of nobility are proud, stronger too his hold over many another on pretext of their authority.

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

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

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

A new will had begun to emerge in me, the will to worship you disinterestedly⁵⁶ and enjoy you, O God, our only sure felicity; but it was not yet capable of surmounting that earlier will strengthened by inveter-

53. See Mt 12:29.

54. See 2 Tm 2:21.

55. See Wis 10:21.

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

ate custom. And so the two wills fought it out—the old and the new,⁵⁷ the one carnal, the other spiritual—and in their struggle tore my soul apart.

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

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

12. I was thus weighed down by the pleasant burden of the world in the way one commonly is by sleep, and the thoughts with which I attempted to meditate upon you⁶¹ were like the efforts of people who are trying to wake up, but are overpowered and immersed once more in slumberous deeps. No one wants to be asleep all the time, and it is generally agreed among sensible people that being awake is a better state, yet it often happens that a person puts off the moment when he must shake himself out of sleep because his limbs are heavy with a lassitude that pulls him toward the more attractive alternative, even though he is already trying to resist it and the hour for rising has come; in a similar way I was quite sure that surrendering myself to your love would be better than succumbing to my lust, but while the former course commended itself and was beginning to conquer, the latter charmed and chained me. I had no answer to give as you said to me, *Arise, sleeper,*

57. See Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10.

58. See Gal 5:17.

59. See Rom 7:16-17.

60. See 2 Tm 2:4.

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

rise from the dead: Christ will enlighten you,⁶² and plied me with evidence that you spoke truly; no, I was convinced by the truth and had no answer whatever except the sluggish, drowsy words, "Just a minute," "One more minute," "Let me have a little longer." But these "minutes" never diminished, and my "little longer" lasted inordinately long.

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

Conversation with Ponticianus

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

I continued to attend to my accustomed duties, but with mounting anxiety. I longed for you every day and spent as much time in your church as could be spared from my business, under the weight of which I was groaning. With me was Alypius, who since his third stint as assessor⁶⁵ had been without legal advisory work, and was now looking round for clients to whom he might once more sell his counsel, just as I was trying to sell the art of speaking, insofar as it ever can be imparted by teaching. Nebridius, however, yielding to our friendly persuasion, had consented to act as assistant teacher to Verecundus, a citizen and schoolmaster of Milan who was very well known to us all. This man had most earnestly desired reliable help from someone of our company, for he stood in sore need of it, and he had reinforced his insistent plea by appealing to his close association with us. Nebridius was not, therefore, attracted to this

62. Eph 5:14.

63. See Rom 7:24-25.

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

65. See VI, 10, 16.

post by ambition for the advantages it might bring him, for he could have done better by the profession of literature, had he willed; he undertook it simply as a kindly service because, being such a very gentle and accommodating friend, he was unwilling to set our request aside. He carried out his duties with the utmost discretion, taking care not to attract the attention of persons whom the world regarded as important. He thus steered clear of any mental disturbance they might have caused him, for he wanted to keep his mind free and disengaged for as much of his time as he possibly could, with a view to research and to reading or listening to anything connected with wisdom.

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

15. His discourse led on from this topic to the proliferation of monasteries, the sweet fragrance rising up to you from the lives of monks, and

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

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

the fecund wastelands of the desert. We had known nothing of all this.⁶⁸ There was even a monastery full of good brothers at Milan, outside the city walls, under Ambrose's care, yet we were unaware of it.

Story of conversion of two court officials at Trier

Ponticianus went on talking and developing the theme, while we listened, spellbound. So it came about that he told us that one day when the court was at Trier⁶⁹ he and three of his colleagues went out for a walk in the gardens abutting on the walls,⁷⁰ while the emperor was occupied with the morning show at the circus. Now it happened that as they strolled about they split into pairs, one companion staying with Ponticianus while the other two went off by themselves. In their wandering these latter chanced upon a cottage where some servants of yours were living, men poor in spirit, the kind of people to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs.⁷¹ There they found a book which contained *The Life of Antony*.⁷² One of them began to read it. His admiration and enthusiasm were aroused, and as he read he began to mull over the possibility of appropriating the same kind of life for himself, by renouncing his secular career to serve you alone. (He belonged to the ranks of so-called administrative officers.⁷³) Then quite suddenly he was filled with a love of holiness and a realistic sense of shame and disgust with himself;⁷⁴ he turned his gaze toward his friend and demanded, "Tell me: where do we hope all our efforts are going to get us? What are we looking for? In whose cause are we striving? Does life at court promise us anything better than promotion to being Friends of the Emperor?⁷⁵ And once we are, will that not be a

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

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

70. The setting of this scene in a garden anticipates the experience of Augustine and Alypius in another garden, soon to be related; the parallel is reinforced by many verbal similarities. 71. See Mt 5:3.

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

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

74. See Ps 4:5(4).

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

precarious position, fraught with perils? Will it not mean negotiating many a hazard, only to end in greater danger still? And how long would it take us to get there? Whereas I can become a friend of God⁷⁶ here and now if I want to."

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

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

7. 16. Ponticianus went on with his story; but, Lord, even while he spoke you were wrenching me back toward myself, and pulling me round

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

77. See Lk 14:28; Mt 19:27; Lk 5:11,28.

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

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

18. I had been telling myself that my reason for putting off day after day⁸³ the decision to renounce worldly ambition and follow you alone was that I could as yet see no certain light by which to steer my course. But the day had dawned when I was stripped naked in my own eyes and

78. See Jer 2:27.

79. See Ps 49(50):21.

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

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

82. See Sir 2:16.

83. See Sir 5:8.

my conscience challenged me within: "Where is your ready tongue now? You have been professing yourself reluctant to throw off your load of illusion because truth was uncertain. Well, it is certain now, yet the burden still weighs you down, while other people are given wings on freer shoulders,⁸⁴ people who have not worn themselves out with research, nor spent a decade and more reflecting on these questions."

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

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

Struggle in the garden

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

Adjacent to our lodgings was a small garden. We were free to make use of it as well as of the house, for our host, who owned the house, did

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

85. See Mt 6:6.

86. See Mt 11:12.

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

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

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

88. See Jn 11:33.

89. See Ps 34(35):10.

90. See I, 18, 28.

than the soul was to obey its own command in carrying out this major volition, which was to be accomplished within the will alone.

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

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

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

10. 22. Some there are who on perceiving two wills engaged in deliberation assert that in us there are two natures, one good, the other evil, each with a mind of its own.⁹¹ Let them perish from your presence, O God,⁹² as perish all who talk wildly and lead our minds astray.⁹³ They are evil themselves as long as they hold these opinions, yet these same

91. Throughout this chapter he attacks Manichean views.

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

93. See Tj 1:10.

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

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

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

94. Eph 5:8.

95. See Jn 1:9.

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

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

98. See Rom 7:17, 20.

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

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

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

The same holds true for good impulses. I would put these questions to them: Is it good to find delight in a reading from the apostle? To enjoy the serenity of a psalm? To discuss the gospel? To each point they will reply, "Yes, that is good." Where does that leave us? If all these things tug at our will with equal force, and all together at the same time, will not these divergent inclinations put a great strain on the human heart, as we deliberate which to select? All are good, but they compete among themselves until one is chosen, to which the will, hitherto distracted

between many options, may move as a united whole. So too when the joys of eternity call us from above, and pleasure in temporal prosperity holds us fast below, our one soul is in no state to embrace either with its entire will. Claimed by truth for the one, to the other clamped by custom, the soul is torn apart in its distress.

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

26. The frivolity of frivolous aims, the futility of futile pursuits,¹⁰¹ these things that had been my cronies of long standing,¹⁰² still held me back, plucking softly at my garment of flesh and murmuring in my ear, "Do you mean to get rid of us? Shall we never be your companions again after that moment . . . never . . . never again? From that time onward so-and-so will be forbidden to you, all your life long." And what was it that they were reminding me of by those words, "so-and-so," O my God, what were they bringing to my mind? May your mercy banish such memories far from me! What foul deeds were they not hinting at, what disgraceful exploits! But now their voices were less than half as loud, for they no longer confronted me directly to argue their case, but muttered

100. A possible echo of Persius' Fifth Satire (5.127), from which he quotes in the following chapter.

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

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

behind my back and slyly tweaked me as I walked away, trying to make me look back. Yet they did slow me down, for I could not bring myself to tear free and shake them off and leap across to that place whither I was summoned, while aggressive habit still taunted me: "Do you imagine you will be able to live without these things?"

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

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

12. 28. But as this deep meditation dredged all my wretchedness up from the secret profundity of my being and heaped it all together before

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

104. See Ps 112(113):9.

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

106. See Ps 118(119):85.

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

"Pick it up and read"

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

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

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

109. See Ps 6:4(3).

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

111. This seems to be an allusion to Persius 5.66-69, but the Latin sound, *Cras, cras*, resembled the raucous cry of a crow, as Augustine remarks in his *Expositions of the Psalms* 102. 16; see *Sermon* 224.4.4.

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

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

Conversion of Augustine and Alypius; Monica's

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

We went indoors and told my mother, who was overjoyed. When we related to her how it had happened she was filled with triumphant delight and blessed you, who have power to do more than we ask or under-

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

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

115. Rom 14:1.

stand,¹¹⁶ for she saw that you had granted her much more in my regard than she had been wont to beg of you in her wretched, tearful groaning. Many years earlier you had shown her a vision of me standing on the rule of faith;¹¹⁷ and now indeed I stood there, no longer seeking a wife or entertaining any worldly hope, for you had converted me to yourself. In so doing you had also converted her grief into a joy,¹¹⁸ far more abundant than she had desired, and much more tender and chaste than she could ever have looked to find in grandchildren from my flesh.

116. See Eph 3:10.

117. See III, 11, 19.

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

BOOK IX

Death and Rebirth

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

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

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

2. See Ps 34(35):10.

3. See Ps 34(35):3.

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

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

6. See Mt 11:30.

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