

8.1.1 My God, may I recall with thanksgiving and confess to you *your mercies towards me* (Ps. 86.12–13 [Ps. 85.13]). *Let my bones be steeped in your love* and let them say: *Lord, who is like unto you?* (Ps. 35.10 [Ps. 34.10]). *You have burst my bonds*, and I would *offer to you the sacrifice of praise* (Ps. 116.16–17 [Ps. 117.16–17]). How you burst them, I shall tell; and all who worship you, when they hear it, shall say: *Blessed be the Lord God in heaven and on earth; great and marvellous is his name.*¹ Your words had lodged deep in my being, and *you hemmed me in on every side* (Is. 29.2). Concerning your eternal life I was certain, even though I saw it *in a glass darkly* (1Cor. 13.12). As for the incorruptibility of your substance, all my uncertainty on that score had been taken from me, since I saw that every substance comes from your substance. I desired not to be more certain about you, but to stand more firmly in you. But concerning my temporal life, all was uncertain; my heart was yet to be cleansed of the old leaven (1Cor. 13.12). I had chosen the Way, who is our Saviour, but was still reluctant to pass through the narrow places of that Way (cf Matt. 7.14).

Then you put a thought into my mind, and it seemed good in my sight to go straight to Simplicianus. It was clear to me that he was a good servant of yours; in him your grace shone out. I had heard that from his youth he had lived a life of complete devotion to you. He was now an old man; and, given his great age, and the devout zeal with which he followed your Way, I was sure he had experienced much and had learnt much. And so it was. I wanted, therefore, to share with him the ebb and flow of my uncertainties, and to hear from him what was the proper middle course for one affected as I was, so that I could *walk in your Way* (Ps. 128.1 [Ps. 127.1]).

¹ 'Blessed be the Lord . . . is his name'. An agglomeration of references to Ps. 72.19 [Ps. 71.18], Ps. 135.6 [Ps. 134.6], Ps. 75.1 [Ps. 74.1]).

8.1.2 I could see that the Church was full of people, each according to their own sort.² I had no pleasure in my worldly business, and it was now a great burden on me, for I was no longer set on fire by my familiar desires – the hope of high office or of wealth – to endure such heavy servitude. Such things held no delight for me compared with your sweetness and *the beauty of your house*, which I loved (Ps. 26.8 [Ps. 25.8]). But I was still caught fast in my entanglement with womankind. Your Apostle did not forbid me to marry, but he urged me to better things and *would have all men to be as he was* (1Cor. 7.7–8). In my weakness, I chose a more comfortable spot; and for this one reason I was tossed around with sickness in all other matters, consumed and wasting away with anxieties. Being bound over to the conjugal life, I was forced to conform to it even in respect of things I had no wish to undergo. I had heard from the mouth of truth that there are *eunuchs who have made themselves so for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven*, but *let him receive this who can receive it* (Matt. 12.9). It is certain that *all men are vain in whom there is no knowledge of God, nor from among the things that seem good have they been able to find him who is* (Wisdom 13.1). I was not now in that state of vanity; I had transcended it, and by the universal testimony of all creation had found you, our Creator, and your Word, who is with you, and with you is one God, through whom you have created all things (Jn 1.1–3). And there is another sort of impiety – that of those who *knowing God have not worshipped him as God, nor given thanks* (Rom. 1.22). Into this error, too, I had fallen; but your right hand raised me up, took me from it, and set me in a place where I could recover; for you have said to man: *Behold, piety is wisdom* (Job 28.28), and *do not wish to appear wise* (Prov. 26.5), for *saying they are wise they have made themselves fools* (Rom. 1.22). I had now found the great pearl. It remained for me to *sell all I had and buy it* (Matt. 19.21), and that I could not do.

8.2.3 Therefore I went directly to Simplicianus, who was the father of the current Bishop, Ambrose, by virtue of baptism,

² '... each according to their own sort'. Based on 1Cor. 7.7, where the division is between married and unmarried Christians.

and whom Ambrose indeed loved as a father. I told him of the circuitous paths in which I had strayed. But when I mentioned the fact that I had read various books of the Platonist persuasion, translated into Latin by Victorinus, the sometime City Orator at Rome, who, as I had heard, had died a Christian, Simplicianus congratulated me on not having stumbled on the literature of other philosophers; they were, he said, *full of fallacies and deceits, according to the elements of this world* (Col. 2.8), whereas the Platonist literature hinted in every way at God and his Word. Then, by way of exhorting me to the humility of Christ which is *hidden from the wise and revealed to the little children* (Matt. 11.25), he gave me his own recollections of Victorinus himself, whom he had known very well when he was at Rome; and he told me a story about him that I will not keep to myself. For I am bound to confess and offer great praise to your grace for Victorinus's action. He was an old man of great learning, most skilled in every liberal art, who had read and evaluated the works of so many philosophers. He had taught a great many noble Senators, and, in reward for his distinguished discharge of his office as teacher, had been granted what the citizens of this world deem the highest honour of all, namely a statue in the Forum at Rome. He had until his old age been a worshipper of idols and a participant in the sacrilegious rites with which, at that time, the vast majority of the Roman nobility were full – the rites in which they sighed for the Infant Osiris, for

... those monstrous deities, mongrel-gods begot
Of every breed, barking Anubis – who against
Neptune and Venus and Minerva once
Wielded their weapons.³

³ 'those monstrous deities ... weapons'. Taken from Virgil, *Aeneid* 8.698–700, a description of the prophetic representation on the Shield of Aeneas of the Battle of Actium. Anubis and Osiris are Egyptian deities revered by Cleopatra, opposed to the traditional Roman gods; the mystery cult of Osiris enjoyed some popularity under the Roman Empire. Here Augustine pokes fun at the Roman aristocracy for resenting the innovation of Christianity, when at least some of them were devotees of the foreign cults vilified in Rome's great patriotic poem.

These were the gods whom Rome had once conquered, and whose aid she now implored; and for many years old Victorinus had defended them with thunderous eloquence. But he was not ashamed to become a child of Christ, an infant at your font, *bending his neck to the yoke of humility* (Ecclesiasticus 51.34, Jer. 27.12, Matt. 11.29) and conquering his pride before the *reproach of the Cross* (Gal. 5.11).

8.2.4 O Lord, Lord, who *bowed down the heavens and descended, who touched the mountains and they smoked* (Ps. 144.5 [Ps. 143.5]), by what means did you steal into Victorinus's heart? He was reading (according to Simplicianus) the Holy Scriptures and making a most thorough inspection and scrutiny of the whole of Christian literature, and would say to Simplicianus – not openly, but as between friends – 'Rest assured that I am now a Christian.' Simplicianus would reply, 'I shall not believe it, or set you down as a Christian, until I see you in the church of Christ.' And Victorinus would laugh at him and say, 'Is it, then, walls that make a Christian?' He would often say the same thing, that he was now a Christian, and Simplicianus would make the same reply, and get the same jibe about walls in return. Victorinus was afraid of offending his friends, those proud worshippers of demons, thinking that enmity would come crashing down upon him from the heights of their Babylonian elevation, as if from the *cedars of Lebanon, which the Lord has not yet laid low* (Ps 29.5 [Ps. 28.5]).

But having read and drunk in the Scriptures and accepted their trustworthiness, he became afraid of being denied by Christ before the holy angels, if he was afraid to confess him before men (cf Matt. 10.32–3, Mk 8.38, Lk 12.8–9); and it became apparent to him that he was guilty of a great crime in being ashamed of the mysteries of your humility but not of the sacrilegious rites of the proud demons, which he had received by tradition and proudly imitated. Accordingly, he put off his shame for vanity, and blushed for the truth; and suddenly and unexpectedly he said to Simplicianus, 'Let us go to church. I want to become a Christian.' Unable to contain himself for joy, Simplicianus set off with him. Not long after he had been steeped in

the first mysteries of instruction, he also enrolled for regeneration through baptism. Rome wondered, the Church rejoiced. The proud *saw it and were wroth; they gnashed with their teeth, and were consumed away* (Ps. 112.10 [Ps. 111.10]). But to your servant, *the Lord God was his hope, nor did he give heed to vanities and lying follies* (Ps. 40.4 [Ps. 39.5]).

8.2.5 When at last the moment came for him to make his profession of faith, which at Rome it is customary for all who are to proceed to your grace to repeat according to a form of words that they have learnt by heart, from a prominent position in sight of the faithful, Simplicianus told me that the priests offered Victorinus the opportunity to repeat it in a more private setting – an offer usually made to those who are likely to hesitate out of shyness. Victorinus, however, preferred to profess his salvation in the sight of the saintly multitude. For it was not salvation that he taught in his duties as Professor of Rhetoric; but he had made a public profession of that! How much less, then, ought he to fear to pronounce your word before your tame flock, having been unafraid to address the mad crowds in his own words! So he went up to repeat the profession; and as each one present recognized him, all whispered his name to each other in a hubbub of mutual delight. And who there did not recognize him? A hushed cheer of shared joy rang through the mouth of all: 'Victorinus! Victorinus!' Suddenly they cheered in exultation at seeing him, then at once fell silent in anticipation of hearing him. He made his pronouncement of the true faith with the plainest assurance, and all wished to take him into their heart. This they did with love and rejoicing; these were the hands that took him in.

8.3.6 O good God, what is it within man that makes him rejoice more over the salvation of a soul given up for dead and his deliverance from a greater peril, than if that soul had never been given up, or the peril had been less? You also, merciful Father, *rejoice more over one penitent than over the ninety-nine righteous who have no need of repentance*. We too listen with great joy, when we hear how the shepherd exults to carry the lost sheep back on his shoulders, and how the neighbours of the woman

who found the coin rejoice with her when it is put back in your treasury (cf Lk 15.4-7), and the *joyful solemnities of your house* (Ps. 26.8 [Ps. 25.8]) drive out our tears when the lesson of the Prodigal Son is read there; how he *was dead, and lives again, was lost, and is found* (Lk 15.32). It is in us, therefore, and in your angels, sanctified by your sacred love, that you rejoice. For *you are the same for ever* (Ps. 102.27 [Ps. 101.28], Hebr. 1.12), since you have ever known in the same way the things that do not exist for ever, or do not always exist in the same way.

8.3.7 What is it, then, in a soul, that it delights in finding or having returned to it the things that it loves more than if it had always held on to them? All things bear witness to this, and all things cry aloud in testimony that this is so. The victorious general celebrates his triumph; but had he not fought, he would not be victorious, and the greater the danger in battle, the greater the joy of his triumph. Sailors tossed by a storm and threatened with shipwreck grow pale at the prospect of death; sky and sea fall calm, and, having been greatly afraid, they are greatly exultant. A loved one lies sick, and his pulse gives evidence of his sickness; all who wish him well are likewise sick at heart. He recovers, and before he can walk with his former vigour, there is joy such as there was not beforehand, when he could walk with perfect health and strength. The very pleasures of human life come to men by means of unpleasurable sensations that do not befall them unexpectedly or against their will, but in accordance with their designs and wishes. There is no pleasure in eating or drinking if there has not been a previous unpleasant sensation of hunger or thirst. Drinkers sometimes eat salty foods to set up an unpleasant feeling of burning, for the quenching of this fire with drink gives enjoyment. It is customary not to hand brides over immediately upon betrothal, lest the man, once married, think cheap a girl he did not sigh for impatiently when betrothed.

8.3.8 This holds good in the case of joys that are shameful and damnable, and in those that are legitimate and lawful. It holds good in the most sincere and honourable friendships. It holds good in the case of one who *was dead, and lives again, who was*

lost, and is found (Lk 15.24, 32). In all cases, the more unpleasant the previous condition, the greater the joy. Why, O Lord my God, seeing as you are yourself your own eternal joy, and there are certain things, of you and around you, that rejoice for ever – why is it that this part of the universe alternates between wax and wane, repulsion and attraction? Could it be that this is the limit and measure that you have given it, seeing as you set all manner of good things and all your righteous works in their proper place and proper time, from the heights of heaven to the depths of the earth, from the beginning to the end of ages, from angel down to worm, from the first motion to the last? Oh, how much higher are you than the heights, and how much deeper than the depths! You never depart from us, yet we can scarce return to you.

8.4.9 Come, O Lord, I pray. Stir us up and call us back; kindle us and take us to yourself. Set us ablaze, and cast your sweetness over us. Let us love you and run to you. Are there not many who return to you from a pit of blindness deeper than Victorinus's; who *draw near to you and are enlightened* (Ps. 34.5 [Ps. 33.6]), when they receive the light? All who receive that light, receive from you *authority to become your children* (Jn 1.23). But if they are less well known to the populace, there is less rejoicing over them even among those who do know them; whereas when many people rejoice together, there is a richer joy even among the individuals in that multitude, as each rouses and fires up the fervour of the other. Moreover, because the converts are known to many, they become a precedent for many, showing how salvation may be gained. They lead the way, and many will follow; and there is much rejoicing, both over the followers and those that have shown the way, since it is not over isolated individuals. Far be it that the *persons of the rich be accepted in your tabernacle before the poor* (Deut. 1.17, 16.19, Ecclesiasticus 42.1, James 2.1-9), seeing as you have chosen *the weak things of the world, to confound the strong, and the inglorious and contemptible things, and have chosen the things that are not as if they were, to make void the things that are* (1Cor. 1.27-8, Rom. 4.17). Even the *very least of your apostles* (1Cor. 15.9), by whose mouth you spoke these

words, having *warred down the pride*⁴ of the proconsul Sergius Paulus by his soldiership, and forced him to submit to the *gentle yoke* (Matt. 12.29) of Christ and become a mere provincial of the great King, loved to be called Paul instead of his previous name of Saul, as a token of that great victory. The more tightly the Enemy has had someone captive, and the more he holds captive because of that one, the more beaten he is; and the proud he holds all the more tightly with the word 'nobility', and through them he holds many more with the word 'precedent'. The greater the esteem, therefore, in which Victorinus was held for his powers of mind, which the Devil had seized and was holding as if it were some fastness impregnable to assault, the more right it was for your children to rejoice in his powers of tongue, that great sharp spear with which the Devil had slain so many. For our King had *bound the strong man* (Matt. 12.29), and they could see how the vessels he had rescued were being *cleansed and made fit for your honour, and serviceable to their Lord for every good work* (2Tim. 2.21).

8.5.10 But by the time your servant Simplicianus told me this story of Victorinus, I was all ablaze to follow his example. It was, indeed, for this that he had told me it. Then, however, Simplicianus added that when in the reign of the Emperor Julian a law had been promulgated forbidding Christians to teach literature or rhetoric, Victorinus had welcomed that law with open arms, and had chosen to abandon the verbiage of the schools rather than abandon your Word, by which you *make eloquent the mouths of infants* (Wisdom 10.21, cf Ps. 8.2 [Ps. 8.3]); and it seemed to me that Victorinus was a man as fortunate as he was courageous, inasmuch as he had found an opportunity to leave himself open to you. This was the very thing that I was sighing for, being loaded with irons not loaded on me by others, but my own iron will. The Enemy kept his hold on my powers of willing, and had made of it a chain for me, and bound me with it. My will was perverted, and became a lust; I obeyed my lust as a slave, and it became a habit; I failed to resist my habit,

⁴ 'warred down the pride'. Based on Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.853; in its original form, a statement of Rome's imperial mission.

and it became a need. It was with this series of interconnected links – for which reason I have called it a chain – that I was constrained in harsh servitude. But the new will which had sprung up within me – the will to worship you without seeking a return, and to enjoy you, O God, my only certain pleasure – was not yet capable of overcoming the former one, buttressed as it was by its very oldness. My *two wills, the old, carnal will, and the new, spiritual will* (cf Eph. 4.22, 24, Col. 3.9–10), were *at war with one another* (Rom. 7.16–17), and in their discord rent my soul in pieces.

8.5.11 From my own experience I realized that what I had read was true in myself: the *flesh lusted against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh* (Gal. 5.17). I was in both the flesh and the spirit, but I was more myself in that which I approved in myself, than in that which I disapproved in myself. By now it was rather not I who was in the flesh, since for the most part I was an unwilling sufferer rather than a willing doer. But it was my own doing that habit gripped me so fiercely, since I had arrived willingly at a place to which I had no wish to come. And who could rightly object, when the sinner is pursued by a righteous judgement? Nor did I now have the excuse I was accustomed to make for not yet despising the world and serving you, namely that I had no certain perception of the truth; that too was now certain. I was still bound to the earth, and refused to serve in your army. I was as afraid to be rid of all that hindered me as I should have been of being hindered.

8.5.12 So it was that the burden of the world overwhelmed me with its sweetness, like sleep; and my thoughts, when I meditated upon you, were like the efforts of a sleeper who wants to wake up, but is overcome by the depths of sleep, and is drowned in it once more. And just as there is no one who wishes to sleep all the time, and all sane people agree that it is better to be awake, nevertheless a man will generally postpone the shaking off of sleep when drowsiness lies heavily upon his limbs. Even though it is no longer his purpose to sleep, he does so willingly enough – even though the time has now come to get up. Likewise I was certain that it was better to entrust myself to your

love than to yield to my own desire; but I was persuaded and convinced of the one, and charmed and chained by the other. I had no reply to give to you when you said to me: *Wake up, sleeper, and rise up from the dead, and Christ will enlighten you* (Eph. 5.14), and when you demonstrated to me from every angle that you spoke the truth. I was convinced of the truth, but had no reply to give – only sleepy and drowsy words: 'Just a minute,' 'A minute more,' 'Let me be for a little while.' But my 'minute' had no limit, and my 'little while' was becoming a long while. It was in vain that I *delighted in your Law according to the inner man, when another law in my members was at war with the law of my mind, and led me captive in the law of sin, which was in my members* (Rom. 7.22–3). For the 'law of sin' is the violent force of habit, by which the mind is held fast and dragged along as punishment for slipping willingly into it. *Wretch that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death, except your grace through Jesus Christ, our Lord?* (Rom. 7.24–5))

8.6.13 How you released me from the bonds of sexual desire which held me so tightly, and from my slavery to the affairs of the world, I shall relate and *confess to your name, O Lord* (Ps. 52.9 [Ps. 51.8]), *my Helper and my Redeemer* (Ps. 119.14 [Ps. 118.15]). My habitual anxiety increased as I went about my business; I sighed daily for you, and haunted your church as much I was permitted by the affairs under whose weight I groaned. With me was Alypius, now resting from his legal work after his third term as Clerk to the Court and looking out for new customers for his legal opinions, as I had customers to whom I would sell an easy way with words, so far as that can be passed on by teaching. Nebridius, for his part, had given way to the claims of friendship and was acting as assistant master to Verecundus, a citizen and grammarian of Milan and close friend of us all, who had been in great need of a faithful assistant, and in the name of friendship had requested the help he so much needed from among our number. It was not, therefore, the desire for wealth that induced him to teach – he was capable of far greater literary activity, if he wished – but, being the sweet-tempered and gentle friend that he was, he refused to scorn our entreaties. He

conducted his work, however, with the greatest caution, taking care not to make a name for himself among persons great *according to this world* (Eph. 2.2), and avoiding in his teaching all that might disturb the quiet of his mind; for that he wished to keep free and unoccupied for as many hours of the day as possible, while he sought to read or hear something concerning wisdom.

8.6.14 One day – I cannot remember the reason why Nebridius was not present – one Ponticianus came to our house to visit Alypius and myself. He was a fellow-citizen of mine, inasmuch as he was an African, and was performing distinguished service in the Palace Guard, and had some business or other with us. We all sat down and began talking. Ponticianus happened to notice a book which was lying on the gaming table in front of us. He picked it up, opened it, and found that it was the works of the Apostle Paul. This was something he had not expected; he had supposed it was one of the books whose profession was wearing me out. He smiled and looked at me, full of joy on my behalf, and amazed to find these books and no others before my eyes. He was a Christian and baptized, and prostrated himself before you in church many times, with constant, daily prayers. When I told him I was giving close attention to those Scriptures, the conversation took a turn: Ponticianus told us about Antony, the Egyptian monk, whose name was well known among your servants but unknown among us until that hour. When Ponticianus discovered this fact, he persisted on that topic of conversation, giving us to understand what a great man Antony was, and amazed at our ignorance. We were dumbfounded to hear of your *mighty works* (Ps. 145.5 [Ps. 144.5]), which you had wrought through the orthodox faith of the Catholic Church. There was the strongest attestation for them; they had occurred within living memory, and almost, indeed, within our own lifetimes. We were all amazed: Alypius and I at the greatness of these wonders, Ponticianus at our ignorance of them.

8.6.15 Then the conversation turned to the vast numbers of monasteries, to the moral life that is a sweet savour to you, to the waste places of the wilderness and the abundant riches they

contain.⁵ There was, indeed, a monastery at Milan, outside the city wall, full of good brothers and under the tutelage of Ambrose; but we had not known this. Ponticianus pressed on and kept talking, and we listened in rapt silence. So it came about that he told us how on one occasion he and three fellow-officers of his at Trier⁶ had gone for a walk in the market gardens adjacent to the city walls, while the Emperor was engaged at the morning show at the Games. They were strolling along in pairs, he with one companion and the other two some way apart. The two pairs, he said, went their separate ways; but the second pair, wandering in no particular direction, stumbled upon a little hovel where lived some servants of yours, *poor in spirit, of such as is the Kingdom of Heaven* (Matt. 5.3). There they found a book containing the *Life of Antony*.⁷ One of them began to read the *Life*, and was set on fire with wonder; and even as he read it, he began to contemplate laying hold of such a life for himself, leaving the Imperial Service (both of them happened to be Officers of Public Affairs),⁸ and serving you. Then, filled all of a sudden with holy love and sober shame, and angry at himself, he cast his eyes on his friend and said: 'Tell me this: all these tasks we endure – where are they taking us? What is it we are looking for? For what reason are we in the Imperial Service? Can we have any greater hope at Court than that of becoming Friends of the Emperor? And if we do, what will we then have that is not frail and beset with perils? How many perils must we

5 '... vast numbers ... they contain'. Christian monasticism has its roots in fourth-century Egypt. The original monks lived outside towns and villages, in the waste country. In western Europe, the 'wilderness' was as much conceptual as local. The monks that Ponticianus and his friends encounter live just outside the city walls. Small islands were another favourite setting.

6 'Trier'. After Milan, the most important Roman administrative centre in the West in late antiquity.

7 *Life of Antony*. By the theologian Athanasius of Alexandria; the first real example of the genre of hagiography. It is preserved in Greek and in two Latin translations.

8 'Officers of Public Affairs'. A division of the Imperial Court whose members were often marked down for rapid promotion to provincial governorships. Among their court duties was the gathering of intelligence. Ponticianus and his colleagues thus enjoyed access to the inner circles of power, and could look forward to high office.

endure to arrive at a greater peril? And when will we do so? But if I wish to become a *friend of God*, behold, *I can become one now!*' (James 2.23, Judith 8.22).

So saying, he cast his eyes back on the page, troubled by the birth pangs of a new life. He read, and was changed within, where you could see; and, as became apparent soon afterwards, his mind began to put off the world. For as he read the *Life* and pondered the shifting tides of his heart, groaning intermittently, he discerned the better course, and resolved upon it.

Now he was yours, he said to his friend: 'I have now cut myself off from the hope we shared, and decided to serve God. This choice I undertake in this place and from this hour. If you will not be like me, do not be against me.' His friend replied that he would stand by him and share with him in this great reward and great service.

Now both were yours; they had begun to build their tower, having paid the requisite cost (cf Lk 14.28) – that of *abandoning all that was theirs and following you* (Matt. 19.27, Lk 5.11, 28). Then Ponticianus and his companion on his walk through the other parts of the garden came to the same place, looking for them. On finding them, they suggested that they should go back, as the sun had now begun to set (cf Lk 9.12, 24.29). Their friends, however, told them of their resolve and purpose, and how the will to do this had arisen and been confirmed in them; and they asked Ponticianus and his companion, if they refused to join them, not to obstruct them. For their part, Ponticianus told us, he and his companion were not at all changed from their former selves, but nevertheless wept for themselves; they joined piously in their friends' joy, commended themselves to their prayers, and went off towards the Palace, trailing their hearts on the ground, while their friends remained in the hovel, setting their hearts in heaven. Both men, moreover, were engaged; but when their brides heard their story, they too dedicated their virginity to you.

8.7.16 This much Ponticianus told us, but it was you who through his words turned me back to myself. You took me from behind my own back, where I had placed myself so long as

I refused to attend to myself, and you *set me before my own face* (Ps. 50.21 [Ps. 49.21]), where I could see how foul I was: twisted and dirty, full of stains and sores. I saw and was horrified, and *there was nowhere I could flee from myself* (cf Ps. 139.7 [Ps. 138.7]). Even if I tried to avert my gaze from myself, Ponticianus was saying what he was saying, and again you confronted me with myself and painted a picture of me on my eyes, so that I might *discover my iniquity and loathe it* (Ps. 36.2 [Ps. 35.3]). I knew my iniquity; but I hid it away and hushed it up and tried to forget it.

8.7.17 But as Ponticianus told his story, the more ardent the love I felt for those men who, as I was hearing, had been moved to such a wholesome frame of mind, in that they had entrusted themselves wholly to you for their healing, the more I loathed and execrated myself in comparison with them. Many years – perhaps twelve – had flowed away (and my life with them) since in my nineteenth year I had read Cicero's *Hortensius* and been stirred up to a zeal for wisdom, and all that time I had postponed the decision to despise earthly happiness and leave myself free to hunt for wisdom instead. Merely to seek this wisdom, even if I did not find it, now seemed preferable to finding treasure houses or kingships of the nations, or an abundance of bodily pleasures that surpassed all my wishes. But I had spent my young manhood in extreme misery; in such misery I had besought you, on the very brink of manhood, to give me chastity: 'Grant me chastity and continence,' I had said, 'but please, not yet.' I was afraid that you would swiftly answer my prayer and swiftly heal me from the sickness of concupiscence, which I would rather have satiated than extinguished. Moreover, I had walked the crooked paths of an impious superstition; not indeed certain of it, but holding it preferable to other things, which I did not seek with due piety, but had fought as an enemy.

8.7.18 I had thought that I was postponing from day to day the decision to despise my worldly hope and follow you alone on the grounds that no certain landmark had emerged, to which I could steer my course. The day had now come to stand naked before myself, and within me my conscience rebuked me: 'Where is your tongue? Was it not you who used to say that you

were reluctant to cast off the burden of vanity because the truth was uncertain? Now it is certain, but you are still weighed down by your burden. Those who most readily gain wings on their shoulders⁹ are not those who have worn themselves out in seeking and spent ten years or more pondering these matters.' Thus my conscience gnawed me within, and I was put to shame and confusion most horribly as Ponticianus related his tale. Our conversation concluded, he went off on the errand for which he had come, and I went back to myself. What accusations did I not bring against myself? With what mental whips did I not lash my soul into following me as I endeavoured to come after you? My soul resisted. She refused, and did not excuse herself; all her arguments were used up and shown to be false. There remained to her a mute trepidation; she feared like death to be released from habit, that haemorrhage which was causing her to waste away to death (cf Matt. 9.20, Mk 5.25, Lk 8.43).

8.8.19 As I stirred up my soul in the privacy of my chamber (cf Matt. 6.6), that is, my heart, I stirred up a great quarrel in the house of my inner being. Troubled both in my looks and my mind, I burst in on Alypius, and exclaimed: 'What is it we are enduring? What is it? What have you heard? The untaught arise and *lay hold of heaven* (Matt. 11.12) while we, for all our learning, have no heart – see where we wallow in flesh and blood! Are we ashamed to follow them, merely because they have gone first? Should we not rather be ashamed not to follow them?' These or some such words I spoke, then I was swept away from Alypius by the surging tide of my hesitation, even as he stared at me in silent astonishment. This was not my usual tone. My brow, cheeks, eyes, colour, the pitch of my voice – all these bespoke my thoughts more than any words I uttered.

There was attached to our lodgings a little garden; we had the use of it, along with the whole house, for our landlord, the householder, did not live there. It was to this garden that the tumult of my heart bore me; there would be no one there to

⁹ '... wings on their shoulders ...'. A reference to Plato's story in the *Phaedrus* 249–50 that the souls of philosophers grow wings more quickly than those of others.

hinder my blazing indictment of myself, until it reached an outcome – what outcome, you knew, O Lord, but I did not. I was sick with a frenzy that was my cure, dying to gain life. I knew what evil I was, but not what good I would soon be. So I went off to the garden, with Alypius hard on my heels, for his presence would not deprive me of privacy, and when would he ever abandon me in that frame of mind? We sat down as far from the house as possible. I *groaned in spirit* (Jn 11.33), full of the most turbulent anger that I was not *entering a covenant and compact with you* (Ezek. 16.8), that state of being for which *all my bones* (Ps. 35.10 [Ps. 34.10]) cried out and extolled to the heavens. But neither by ship nor chariot nor on foot had I progressed any nearer to it than I had gone from the house to the place where we were sitting. To progress towards it – indeed, to attain it – was nothing other than the will to progress, but with a will that was strong and whole throughout; not a will that was twisted and tossed around, wounded in part, caught in a struggle between rising and falling factions.

8.8.20 Moreover, despite the tides of hesitation on which I drifted, I was physically able to do many things which people may at times have the will to do and yet be unable; if, for example, they do not have the limbs, or if they are constrained with bonds or enervated by sickness, or hindered in some other way. If I tore my hair, if I beat my brow, if I knitted my fingers and clasped my knee, I did so because I willed it. It was possible, however, for me to have willed it and not done it, if my limbs did not move in obedience. There were, therefore, many things that I did, in the case of which the will to do them was not the same as the ability. Yet I did not do what was both incomparably more in keeping with my purpose, and which I could do as soon as I willed it, since as soon as I willed it, I would will it wholeheartedly. My body more readily obeyed the slightest will of my soul and moved its limbs when ordered, than my soul itself performed its own will, however great that will might be, if it only willed to do so.

8.9.21 Whence is this strange situation? and why is it so? Let your mercy shine out, and let me enquire – if the hidden snares

that are man's punishment and the deep-shadowed tribulations of the children of Adam can respond. Whence is this strange situation? and why is it so? The mind orders the body, and the body obeys; the mind orders itself, and it resists. The mind orders a hand to be moved, and this is accomplished with such ease that its authority can scarcely be discerned from that of a master over his slave. The mind orders the mind to will; it is only one mind, but it does not do as ordered. Whence is this strange situation? and why is it so? I repeat: the mind that gives the order to will could not give the order if it did not will to do so; but it does not do what it orders. It does not will with its whole being, therefore it does not order with its whole being. The mind orders in so far as it wills, and its orders are not obeyed in so far as it does not will them; for it is the will and nothing else that gives the order that the will should exist. If the will were a full will, it would not give the order that the will should exist, since it would already exist. It is not, therefore, such a strange situation, that one should will and not will; it is a sickness of the mind, which, even when uplifted by the truth, does not fully arise, being weighed down by its habit.

8.10.22 *Let them perish from before your face* (Ps. 68.2 [Ps. 67.3]), O God, as perish they do; those *vain talkers and seducers* of men's minds (Tit. 1.10), who, having perceived in their contemplation the existence of two wills, assert that these two minds belong to two Principles,¹⁰ one good, the other evil. They themselves are truly evil, as long as they hold these evil opinions, but these same people would assuredly be good, if they were to perceive the truth and assent to it. Then your Apostle could say to them: *You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord* (Eph. 5.8). As long as they have wished to be light not in the

10 '... two wills ... two Principles'. Augustine here returns to his critique of Manichee dualism, which also focused on the problem of the imperfect correspondence between conscious will and action. The word translated here as 'Principle' is *natura*, which can mean 'substance', but which suggests also 'coming into being'; whereas *substantia*, the word used earlier in this book for the divine substance, suggests 'continuous underlying being'. In ch. 24 Augustine reverts to *substantia* and uses also *principium* to describe the Manichees' false doctrine.

Lord but in themselves, thinking that the soul-principle is the same as God, they have become all the more dense darkness; in their horrendous arrogance they have departed from you, the *true light that lights every man that comes into the world* (Jn 1.9). Take heed what you say; *blush for shame, go to him, and be enlightened, and your countenances will not be ashamed* (Ps. 35.4 [Ps. 34.5]). It was I, when I contemplated *serving my Lord God* (Jer. 30.9), as I had long intended – it was I who willed and I who did not will; it was I. I neither fully willed nor did I fully not will. Thus I contended with myself and was rent in pieces from myself, and even this rending came about without my willing it, nor was it evidence of some mind-principle not my own, but of my own punishment. Therefore it was *no longer I that did this, but the sin that dwelt in me* (Rom. 7.17, 20) – that sin itself being part of the punishment for a sin more willingly committed, since I was a son of Adam.

8.10.23 For if there are as many opposing Principles as there are mutually resisting wills, it follows that there are not two Principles, but many. If one were to consider either going to a Manichee conventicle or to the theatre, the Manichees would exclaim: 'See! There are two natures, one leading him this way, the other leading him back the other way. What other origin could there be for this hesitation between two mutually antagonistic wills?' I, however, say that both wills are evil, both the one that leads him towards the Manichees and the one that leads back towards the theatre. But they believe it is only a good one which leads people to themselves. Well; suppose some Catholic were to ponder and hesitate, caught in a conflict between two opposing wills, whether he should go to the theatre or the Catholic church. Would the Manichees also not hesitate before replying? They will either acknowledge – as they are unwilling to do – that it is out of a good will that one goes to the Catholic church, as people do who have been steeped in its sacraments and abide in them; or suppose that there are two evil Principles and two evil minds in conflict within one man – in which case their usual teaching that there is one nature that is good and another that is evil, cannot be true; or they will be

converted to the truth and not deny that when a man ponders a course of action, then his one soul wavers between various wills.

8.10.24 Let them not say, therefore, when they perceive that in one man there are two wills at war with each other, that there is a conflict between two opposing minds, one good and one bad, springing from opposing substances and opposing Principles. For you, God of truth, rebuke them and refute them. You show that they are wrong in cases where there are two wills, both of which are evil; as when one ponders whether he should kill a man with poison or a dagger, or which of his neighbours' lands he should annex, seeing as he cannot annex both; or whether he should purchase pleasure at the cost of extravagance, or save his money at the cost of avarice; or, to add a third possibility, whether he should burgle a house, if he gets the chance; or, to add a fourth, whether he should commit adultery, if the opportunity arises of doing this too, if all these possibilities coincide at a single moment in time, and all are equally desirable but cannot all be done at once. Where there are so many appetible courses of action, the mind is torn by four or even more different wills, but the Manichees do not, as a rule, state that there is an equally large number of substances. So also in the case of good wills. If I ask them whether it is good to take delight in the reading of the works of the Apostle or the singing of a sober psalm, or whether it is good to proclaim the Gospel, they will reply that each of these is good. Well: if all of these things are equally delectable at once, is not the human heart distended with different wills, while it ponders which of these it should choose for itself? All these wills are good, and yet they strive against each other, until one course of action is chosen, and the whole will, which had been divided into several wills, is channelled into it. So too, although eternity has a delight that draws us upwards, and pleasure in temporal good draws us back downwards, there is no one soul that wills with all its will either one or the other. It is torn in two by the weight of its troubles, as long as it prefers the former for truth's sake, but for familiarity's sake does not put aside the latter.

8.11.25 Such was the sickness and torment that I knew as I charged myself even more bitterly than my wont, twisting and turning in my bonds until such time as they should be broken utterly; for now they held me only by a thread. But hold me they did. You, moreover, pressed hard on me in the secret places of my being. In your severe mercy you redoubled the scourgings that fear and shame were giving me, to keep me from yielding before the last thin thread that remained was broken, and to stop it from regaining its strength and binding me all the more strongly. For I was repeatedly saying in myself, 'One minute more, and let it happen; just one minute more'; and with those words I was already *entering a covenant with you* (Ezek. 16.8). I was on the point of doing it yet not doing it; not slipping back into my former life, but standing from my next life, catching my breath. I strove, and was ever less far from it, and was on the point of touching it and seizing it; but I was not in it, and did not touch it or seize it, hesitant as I was to die to death and live to life. The time-worn course of life, for all its faults, counted with me more than the unfamiliar, for all its merits; and the closer the moment became when I was to be something new, the more horror it instilled in me. But it did not drive me off or turn me aside, but kept me dangling.

8.11.26 I was held back by those supreme frivolities, those *vanities of vanities* (Ecclesiastes 1.2, 12.8), that were my old friends. They plucked at my carnal clothing and whispered, 'Are you dismissing us?' 'From that moment on, we will not be with you – not for eternity!' 'From that moment on, you will not be allowed to do such and such a thing – not for eternity!' And what thoughts they put into my mind, my God, with their 'such and such a thing's! What thoughts! Let your mercy turn them aside from the soul of your servant! What sordid and shameful thoughts! But it was now much less than half my being that listened to them. They did not block my path and speak out openly against me, but whispered behind my back and pinched furtively at me as I left them behind, to make me look back. Nevertheless, they did delay my progress, and I was slow to tear myself away from them, shake them off, and hasten where I was

summoned, as long as Habit, with all its force, said to me, 'Do you think you can do without these?'

8.11.27 But now its words were no more than lukewarm. For, from the direction in which I had set my face, and towards which I hesitated to go, Continence was now revealed to me in all her chaste beauty. Serene she was, not full of dissolute mirth, and nor was there anything dishonourable in her alluring voice as she bade me to come and not to doubt, and her pious hands, as she stretched them out to welcome me and fold me to herself, were full of sheep of your flock, good examples for me. There were many boys and girls there, men and women newly come to adulthood and of every age, grave widows and aged virgins; and in not one of them was Continence barren, but a *mother of children* (Ps. 113.9 [Ps. 112.9]) that are her joy; children she has borne to you, O Lord, her bridegroom. She smiled at me with an encouraging smile, as if saying: 'Can you not do what these men and women have done? Or do you think that they have power to do it in themselves, and not in the Lord their God? The Lord their God it was who gave them to me. Why do you stand back, trusting in yourself, and not stand firm? Cast yourself on him, and do not be afraid. He will not draw back and let you fall. Put away your cares and cast yourself upon him; he will take you up and heal you.' And I blushed all the more, for I could still hear the murmurs of my frivolous pursuits, and I kept dangling in hesitation. Again I thought I heard her speak: 'Close your ears to those impure *limbs of yours upon earth* (Col. 3.5), and let them be put to death. *They speak to you of delights, but not as the Law of the Lord your God*' (Ps. 119.85 [Ps. 118.85]). This debate took place in my own heart, about myself and against myself. Alypius remained firmly at my side, silently waiting the outcome of this unprecedented access of emotion.

8.12.28 But when my meditation had dredged the hidden depths of my being and heaped up in the sight of my heart all the unhappiness I had known, immediately there arose a mighty squall of wind, bearing with it a mighty storm of tears. To pour out this flood of tears, with all the sounds proper to it, I arose and left Alypius; solitude seemed to me more appropriate for

the business of weeping. I took myself off to a more secluded spot, where I would be oppressed by no one's presence, not even his. This was my state of mind, and he perceived it; I do not know what words I spoke, but from them it was clear that my voice was pregnant with tears. This was my state of mind as I arose. Alypius, therefore, remained where we had been sitting together, in utter bewilderment. I threw myself down at random on the ground (it happened to be beneath a fig tree), and gave my tears free rein. The rivers of my eyes, an *acceptable sacrifice* (Ps. 51.17 [Ps. 50.19]), burst their banks, and I spoke at length to you, in this strain if not in these words: '*How long, O Lord? (Ps. 6.3 [Ps. 6.4]). How long, O Lord, will you be angry with us? For ever? Remember not our iniquities that are of old*' (Ps. 79.5, 8 [Ps. 78.5, 8]). I felt myself held by those iniquities, and cried miserably: 'How long, how long, will this "tomorrow, tomorrow" continue? Why not "now"? Why do I not put an end to my shameful conduct from this hour forward?'

8.12.29 So saying, I wept, my heart crushed with very bitterness. And behold, suddenly I heard a voice from the house next door; the sound, as it might be, of a boy or a girl, repeating in a sing-song voice a refrain unknown to me: 'Pick it up and read it, pick it up and read it.'¹¹ Immediately my countenance was changed, and I began to ponder most intensely whether children were in

¹¹ "Pick it up and read it." Why the child should be singing this is uncertain, and Augustine is in any case more concerned with the use God put these words to than with what the child meant by them. But the word translated 'read' can also mean 'pick'; it may be that the child's song referred to figs from the tree, or other fruit. The story of the child's words that are interpreted as marking divine will appears in various forms, but two in particular may well be in Augustine's mind. Ambrose's consecration to the bishopric of Milan is said to have occurred after he, in his capacity as secular official, quelled a riot between the supporters of two opposing candidates for the episcopal see. In the silence that ensued, a child's voice was heard to cry, 'Bishop Ambrose!' So also in the *Aeneid*, Aeneas has received a prophecy (3.255-7) that he will not found his city of Rome until he has been forced by hunger to eat the plates from which he is eating. After his arrival in Italy, his men eat a type of pitta-bread meal, lastly eating the bread itself. At this Aeneas's young son Ascanius observes, as a joke, that they are 'eating their plates'. This is taken as a fulfilment of the prophecy (*Aen.* 7.107ff).

the habit of singing a chant of this sort as part of a game of some kind, but I had no recollection at all of having heard it anywhere. I checked my outburst of tears and arose, taking this to be nothing other than a God-sent command that I should open the Bible and read the first chapter I found, whatever it might be. For I had heard that Antony, on chancing to enter church in the middle of the Gospel reading, had taken heed of what was being read as if it were addressed to himself: *Go and sell all that you have; give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me* (Matt. 19.21).¹² By this divine utterance, I had heard, he was immediately converted to you. In high excitement, therefore, I returned to the place where Alypius was sitting; for I had left my copy of the Apostle Paul there when I had risen to go aside. I seized it, opened it, and read in silence the first heading I cast my eyes upon: *Not in riotousness and drunkenness, not in lewdness and wantonness, not in strife and rivalry; but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh and its lusts* (Rom. 13.13-14). I neither wished nor needed to read more. No sooner had I finished the sentence than it was as if the light of steadfast trust poured into my heart, and all the shadows of hesitation fled away.

8.12.30 I placed my finger or some other marker in the book and closed it; the new-found tranquillity of my features gave Alypius to understand what had happened. He then gave me to understand his own inner state – for of that I was ignorant – in the following way. He asked if he could see what I had been reading. I showed him the passage, and he read attentively, beyond the point to which I had read. I did not know what came next; but it was the words: *Welcome the weak in faith* (Rom. 14.1). This he took to refer to himself, and showed it to me. Strengthened by this admonition, and without any of my troubled hesitation, he joined me in a resolve and purpose that was both good and wholly in accord with his character – a character that had now long differed for the better from my own. Then we went indoors to my mother, and told her what

¹² 'For I had heard . . . follow me'. A summary of events described in the *Life of Antony* ch. 2.

had happened. She rejoiced. We told her how it had happened. She was exultant and triumphant, and blessed you, who *can do more than we ask or understand* (Eph. 3.20); for she saw that in my case you had granted her so much more than she was accustomed to ask with pitiable tears and groans. You had turned me back to yourself; I would seek neither a wife nor any worldly ambition, but stand fast in the rule of faith, where you had revealed to her all those years before that I would be. You *turned her grief into gladness* (Ps. 30.11 [Ps. 29.12]) a gladness much more fruitful than the one she had wanted, and much more full of true love and chastity than she had hoped to gain from any grandchildren, the offspring of my flesh.

BOOK NINE

9.1.1 O Lord, I am your servant; I am your servant, and the son of your handmaid. *You have burst my bonds; I will offer you the sacrifice of praise* (Ps. 116.14-15 [Ps. 115.16-17]). Let my heart and tongue praise you, and *let all my bones say, 'Lord, who is like unto you?'* (Ps. 35.10 [Ps. 34.10]). Let them say this, and answer me. *Tell my soul, 'I am your salvation'* (Ps. 35.3 [Ps. 34.3]). Who am I, and what sort of 'I'? What manner of evil did I not do; or if I did not do, did I say; or if I did not say, did I will? *But you, O Lord, are good and merciful* (Ex. 34.6, Ps. 86.15 [Ps. 85.15], Ps. 103.8 [Ps. 102.8]). With your right hand you had regard for the depth of my deadness, and from the lowest places in my heart you drained away the abyss of corruption, so that I should not will at all what I willed, but will what you willed. But where, throughout that space of years, had my free will been, and from what deep and secret place was it called forth at a moment's notice, – the free will to submit my neck to your *easy yoke*, and my shoulders to your *light burden* (Matt. 11.30), Christ Jesus, *my Helper and my Redeemer* (Ps. 19.15 [Ps. 18.15])? How sweet it suddenly was to me to be deprived of all the sweets of frivolity, and what a joy to throw away what I had feared to lose! For you cast those sweetnesses out of me, you, my true and highest Sweetness; you cast them out, and entered in their stead; you who are sweeter than every pleasure (but not to flesh and blood), brighter than any light (but deeper than any secret place), exalted above all rank (but not to those who exalt in themselves). Now my mind was free from the 'gnawing cares'¹ of politicking, of getting, of wallowing, of scratching the mange of my lusts, and I spoke openly to you, my radiance, my riches, and my salvation, O Lord my God.

9.2.2 It seemed good to me in your sight not to make a sudden break with my routine, but quietly to withdraw the offices of my tongue from the fairs where verbal fluency is bought and sold.

¹ "gnawing cares". Horace, *Odes* 1.18.4.

No more would boys, *meditating not on your Law* (Ps. 119.70 [Ps. 118.70]) and your peace but on the madness and the lies and the warfare of the law courts, purchase from my lips the weapons for their mad passion. By happy coincidence, there were now only very few days left over until the Vintage Vacation,² and I decided to bear them out, and retire at the end of the year in the regular way; and, having been redeemed by you at a price, not return to offer myself for sale. My counsel, therefore, was open before you; but not open to men, except to our band of friends. We agreed among ourselves not to publish the matter abroad to anyone; albeit you had given us, as we *climbed out of the valley of weeping* (Ps. 84.6 [Ps. 83.6-7]) and sang the Song of Ascents,³ sharp arrows and burning coals against the deceitful tongue (Ps. 120.2-3 [Ps. 119.2-3]), which, pretending to give counsel, speaks for the accuser, and which gobbles up like meat and drink what it pretends to love.

9.2.3 You had *pierced my heart with the arrows* (Ps. 11.2 [Ps. 10.3], Prov. 7.23) of your love, and I carried fixed deep in my vital organs your words, and the examples of your servants; those whom, once stained black, you have made radiant, and, once dead, you have made alive. These words and those examples, heaped up on my pondering heart, burnt and took away the slumber that oppressed me. They kept me from falling over the brink into the abyss, and set me so fiercely ablaze that every breath of accusation from the *deceitful tongue* (Ps. 120.2-3 [Ps. 119.2-3]) could only inflame me more, and not put out the fire. But since there would be those who *for your Name's sake, which you have sanctified throughout the earth* (Ezek. 36.23), would praise my avowed purpose, it seemed like self-glory not to wait for the vacation, which was so near, and to abandon my public profession, exposed as it was for all to see. Then everyone would turn their heads towards me, and reflect how I had

² 'Vintage Vacation'. A legal vacation, between 23 August and 15 October. Augustine's fellow-African Christians Minucius Felix (fl. c. A.D. 200-40) and Cyprian of Carthage (A.D. 200-58) see the Vintage Vacation as a suitable time for conversion; the heat of the summer is past, and it is time for the harvest.

³ 'the Song of Ascents'. The title of the Pilgrim Psalms 120-34.

wished to anticipate the beginning of the Vacation, which was so near at hand; and it would be noised abroad that I had been avid to make a show of greatness. And what business of mine was it to have my state of mind so publicly dissected, and for *our good to be blasphemed* (Rom. 14.16)?

9.2.4 Moreover, that summer my lungs had begun to give way under all the pressure of my literary work; I had difficulty catching my breath, and the pains in my chest were evidence that it was damaged, no longer capable of producing a clear, full-toned voice. This circumstance had at first unsettled me greatly, since I was now in effect compelled by necessity to lay down the burden of my teaching duties, or at any rate to take a break from them, to see if I could be cured or recover my strength. But when the full will to leave myself free and to see that *you are Lord* (Ps. 46.10 [Ps. 45.11]) arose and was confirmed in me (Lord, you know these things), I began to rejoice, since this gave me a pretext (and not a spurious one) for my actions, which would lessen the offence that men took at it – men who, for their own children's sake, would have me never be free. Therefore I was full of joy, and bore with the space of time until the end of term (there might have been some twenty days or so). But it needed strength to bear with them, for the greed that had always been my partner in bearing the burden of my professional business had now departed from me, and I remained alone with the burden – or would have done, had Patience not come to my aid. Let some servant of yours and brother of mine say I was wrong to do so; to have suffered myself to sit, even for one day, *in the seat of falsehood* (Ps. 1.1), now that my heart was full of the thought of serving you. I offer no defence. But you, most merciful Lord, did you not forgive and pardon me this sin also in the holy water of baptism?

9.3.5 Verecundus, however, was racked with anxiety at our good purpose; he saw that because of the bonds that bound him so tightly, he was being left behind by those of us who had thrown our lot in together. Not yet a Christian, he had a wife who was baptized, and this hindrance hobbled him more tightly than the rest of us, and kept him from the journey which we others were

undertaking; the only way in which he wanted to be a Christian, he said, was the way in which he could *not* be. But out of friendship he offered to support us out of his own resources, so long as we lived there. *You will repay him, O Lord, at the resurrection of the righteous* (Lk 14.14), since even now you have repaid him for his expenses. For while we were away, being now at Rome, he was seized by an illness of the body, and, having become a Christian and been baptized in this life, he left it for a better. Thus you had mercy not only on him but on us also, lest we, reflecting on his kindness towards us and unable to reckon him one of your flock, should be tormented by a pain too great to bear. Thanks be to you, O God! We are your own. Your words of encouragement and consolation proclaim it; you who are faithful to your promise to repay Verecundus for the use of his country estate at Cassiciacum, where we found rest from the heat of the world in you, with the ever-flourishing verdure of your Garden, for you have *forgiven him his sins on earth* (Matt. 9.5-6, Mk 2.5, 9, Lk 5.23) *on the mountain flowing with milk, your mountain, the fertile mountain* (Ps. 68.15-16 [Ps. 67.16]).

9.3.6 Thus Verecundus was filled with anxiety, Nebridius with rejoicing. Although he too, while not a Christian, had *fallen into the pit* (Ps. 7.16 [Ps. 7.16], Ps. 57.7 [Ps. 56.7]) of that most pernicious error of believing that the flesh of your Son, the Truth, was an illusion, he was in the process of emerging from that pit; and though not yet steeped in any of the sacraments of your Church, he was a most ardent seeker after the Truth. Not long after my conversion and regeneration through baptism in you, he, a baptized Catholic also, serving you in perfect chastity and continence in Africa, among his own people, his whole house having now become Christian through him, was released by you from the flesh. And now he lives in the *bosom of Abraham* (Lk 16.22); for whatever is signified by that 'bosom of Abraham', there lives my beloved Nebridius, my sweet friend, whom from being a freedman you have made your adoptive son. There he lives; for what other place is there for a soul such as his? There he lives, in the place concerning which he asked so many questions of me, a mere man and unversed in such matters. No

longer does he put his ear to my mouth, but puts his spiritual mouth to your fountain and drinks all the wisdom he desires or can, endlessly blessed. Nor do I think he is so drunk with that wisdom that he forgets us, seeing as you, whom he drinks in, *are mindful of us* (Ps. 136.23 [Ps. 135.23]). Such was our state; Verecundus we consoled, sad as he was despite our friendship at our conversion, and exhorted him to be faithful in his own degree, that of conjugal life, and Nebridius we awaited, until such time as he should follow us, as he could and would do very shortly. At last those days had unfolded. Long and many they seemed to us, in our longing for the freedom and leisure to sing from the depths of my heart: *My heart has said to you, I will seek your face; your face, Lord, will I seek* (Ps. 27.9 [Ps. 26.8]).

9.4.7 The day came for me to be freed in practice from my profession of rhetoric, from which I had already been freed in thought. And it came to pass that you rescued my tongue from the pit from which you had already rescued my heart, and I gave thanks to you as I set off, rejoicing, with all my friends, for Nebridius's estate. My literary activity there (which, indeed, was now in your service, but still breathing all the pride of the schools, like a boxer in a break between bouts) is attested by the books I wrote – dialogues with those present, or with myself alone before you; my dialogues with Nebridius, who was absent, are attested by my letters. When could there be time enough to recall all your great benefits towards us at that time, especially as I press on to record other and greater benefits? For my memory calls me back, and it is sweet to me to confess to you the inner scourges with which you mastered me, and how you flattened me out, *bringing down the mountains and hills* of my thoughts, and how you *made straight* my winding paths, and my *rough places smooth* (Is. 40.4, Lk 3.4-5); and how you brought my heart's brother, Alypius himself, into subjection to the Name of your only-begotten Son, *our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (2Pet. 3.18), which at first he had thought unworthy to be engrafted into our writings. He had wanted them to be redolent more of the cedarwood tablets of the schoolroom (those cedars which the Lord had now laid low) (Ps. 28.5 [Ps. 27.5]), than the health-

giving herbs of the Church, simples against serpents (cf Mk 16.18).

9.4.8 And how I cried out to you, my God, when I read the Psalms of David, those songs of faith, whose pious music will not admit the haughty spirit, while yet untutored in your true love and a catechumen, taking my vacation on the estate with my fellow-catechumen Alypius. My mother too stayed fast with us, feminine in her attire but masculine in her faith, with the serene assurance of an old woman, a mother's love, and a Christian's piety. How I cried out to you as I read those Psalms, and how they inflamed me for you, and set me ablaze to repeat them, if I could, throughout the world, as a rebuke to human pride! But throughout the world they are indeed sung, and *there is none that can hide from your heat* (Ps. 19.6 [Ps. 18.7]). What bitter pangs of resentment and anger I felt for the Manichees, and what pity too, for they did not know your sacraments, those healing medicines, and were madly opposed to the antidote that could have healed their madness. I wish they could have been by my side then, without my knowing that they were there, and that they could have looked on my face and heard my cries when I read the Fourth Psalm during that period of leisure, and seen how that Psalm affected me: *The God of my righteousness heard me when I called upon him; he delivered me in my tribulation. Have mercy upon me, O Lord, and hear my prayer* (Ps. 4.1 [Ps. 4.2]). I wish they could have listened, without my knowing that they were listening, so that they would not think that it was for their sake that I spoke as I did as I read the Psalm. Nor, indeed, would I have spoken the words I did, nor in the same way, if I had felt myself watched or listened to; nor, if I had, would they have paid attention to how I spoke with myself and to myself before you about my mind's intimate feelings.

9.4.9 I was at once bristling with fear and boiling over with hope and *exultation in your mercy* (Ps. 31.8 [Ps. 30.7-8]), O Father. All this was manifest in my eyes and my voice, when *your good Spirit* (Ps. 143.10 [Ps. 142.10]) turned back towards us and said: *Children of men, how long will you be heavy of heart? Why do you love vanity, and seek after falsehood?* (Ps. 4.2 [Ps. 4.3]).

For I had loved vanity, and sought after falsehood. And all the while you, O Lord, had *glorified your Holy One* (Eph. 1.20), raising him up from the dead and *setting him at your right hand* (Eph. 1.20), from whence he could send forth from on high his promised *Advocate, the spirit of truth* (Lk 24.49, Jn 14.16-17). He had indeed already sent him, but I did not know it. He had already sent him, for he had already been glorified by his resurrection from the dead and his ascension into heaven. Before this, *the Spirit had not yet been given, for Jesus had not yet been glorified* (Jn 7.39). *How long will you be heavy of heart?* the prophetic voice proclaims. *How long will you love vanity, and seek after falsehood? Know that the Lord has glorified his Holy One* (Ps. 4.2-3 [Ps. 4.3-4]). 'How long', it proclaims, and 'know' it proclaims, but for so long had I been ignorant, loving vanity and seeking after falsehood; and therefore I *heard and trembled* (Habbakuk 3.16), for these words were addressed to those such as I remembered that I had been. For in those deceitful doctrines which I had held to be the truth, there was vanity and falsehood; and in the pain of recollection I was full of groans, loud and heavy. If only they could have heard my groans, those who still love vanity and seek after falsehood; perhaps they would be moved, and spew out their doctrines, so that you would *hear their prayer when they cried out to you* (Ps. 4.1, Ps. 31.25 [Ps. 30.23]). For it was a true death of the flesh that our Intercessor died for us.

9.4.10 I read the words: *Be angry, and sin not* (Ps. 4.4 [Ps. 4.5]), and how moved I was, my God! I had now learnt to be angry with myself for my past, so as not to sin in the future; and rightly was I angry, seeing as it was not some other being, belonging to the 'Race of Darkness', which was sinning in me; those who say *this store up wrath for themselves in the day of anger, when your righteous judgement shall be revealed* (Rom. 2.5). No longer did I think my goods external ones, nor did I seek them with the eyes of my flesh, by the light of the physical sun. For those whose wish it is to rejoice in outward things, soon waste away and spend themselves on things visible and temporal, and feed their famished minds by licking at illusions. Would that they

grew weary of hunger, and said *Who will show us good things?* Let us speak, and let them listen: *The light of your countenance has been sealed on us, O Lord* (Ps. 4.6 [Ps. 4.6-7]). We are not the *light that lightens every man that comes into the world* (Jn 1.9), but we are enlightened by you; thus *we who were once darkness are light in you* (Eph. 5.8). Would that they saw that inward Eternity, having tasted which I gnashed my teeth, being unable to show it to them if they came to me with their hearts looking outwards, turned away from you, and said: *Who will show us good things?* (Ps. 4.6). It was there, where I was angry; there, within my chamber, where I was filled with compunction, where I had made my sacrifice to you, *offering my old life* (Eph. 4.22, Col. 3.9), and, putting my hope in you, beginning to meditate on my renewal – there you cast your sweetness over me, *gave me gladness of heart* (Ps. 4.7). I cried out loud as I read all this outwardly, and recognized its truth within; nor did I wish to increase in earthly goods only to consume and be consumed by time, when I had other *corn and wine and oil* (Ps. 4.8 [Ps. 4.9]) in that eternal Unity.

9.4.11 And from the depths of my heart I cried out in the words of the next verse: oh, those words *in peace*, and *in the Same*! Why does it say: *I will lie down and take my rest* (Ps. 4.7 [Ps. 4.9])? Because who will stand against us, when the word comes true that is written: *Death is swallowed up in victory* (1Cor. 15.54)? And you are indeed the Same,⁴ seeing as you are unchanging, and in you there is rest and forgetfulness of all our labours, since there is none other with you, nor is there a multitude of other things to be attained that are not what you are; but *you alone, O Lord, have stablished me in hope* (Ps. 4.8 [Ps. 4.10]). I read this Psalm and was filled with ardour, but found nothing that I could do to those deaf, dead Manichees, of whom I had been one – a pestilence, one who barked against you, full of bitterness, blind to the writings honeyed with the honey of heaven, radiant with

⁴ 'the Same'. A word that Augustine uses almost as a title of God. It is not itself a translation of any Greek technical philosophical term, but is presented in a context which suggests Neo-Platonic emphasis on the immutability and transcendence of God.

your radiance; and I was grieved over the enemies of this Scripture.

9.4.12 When shall I recall all that befell during the days of that vacation? But I have not forgotten, nor shall I pass over in silence the sharpness of your lash, nor the wondrous swiftness of your mercy. You tortured me with a toothache, and when it had grown so severe that I could not talk, the thought arose in my heart that I should call on all the friends that were with me to pray for me to you, the God of all manner of salvation. I wrote this request on a wax tablet and gave it to them to read; and as soon as we had set our knees in suppliant posture, the pain fled. But what pain was it? How did it flee? I was afraid, *my Lord and my God* (Jn 20.28), I acknowledge; not since my life began had I known such a thing. By secret ways your commandments crept into my deepest being. Rejoicing in faith, I *praised your name* (Ps. 145.2 [Ps. 144.2], Ecclesiasticus 51.15); but that faith would not leave me free from concern about past sins, which had not yet been forgiven me by washing in your baptism.

9.5.13 The Vintage Vacation over, I sent word back to Milan that her citizens should look for another seller of words for their students, both because I had chosen to serve you, and because I was not strong enough for that profession, in view of my dyspnoea and chest pains. I also wrote to your high priest, that holy man Ambrose, giving him some indication of my past wanderings and of my present resolve, and asking for advice on which portions of your Scriptures I should read first of all, in order to become more fit and ready to receive your great grace. He bade me read the Prophet Isaiah; I suppose because he is the plainest foreteller of the Gospel, and of the calling of the Gentiles. But I, not understanding my first reading from him, and thinking that the whole book was similar, put it off, to be resumed when I was better versed in the language of the Lord.

9.6.14 When the time came for me to put my name forward for baptism, we left the estate in the country and returned to Milan. Alypius, too, chose to be reborn with me in you; he had now *clothed himself with the humility* (Col. 3.12) that befits your

sacraments, and, mighty conqueror as he was of the body, had resolved with rare courage to tread even Italy's icy soil barefoot.⁵ The young Adeodatus, too, we made one of our company – my son after the flesh, and the child of my sin; but you had shaped him well. He was aged just fifteen in years, but in his abilities he surpassed many a learned sage. It is your gifts that I confess to you, O Lord my God, *creator of all things* (2Macchabees 1.24, Ambrose, *Hymns* 1.2.1), who can in manifold ways refashion our unlovely deeds in loveliness; for I had no part in that boy except the sin. As for his nurturing by us in your discipline, it was you who inspired us, and no other. There is a book of mine, entitled *The Teacher*; in it, it is he who talks with me. You know that the opinions put forward in that book by the person of my interlocutor, were his, when he was aged sixteen in years. I saw other things about him more wondrous still. I was in awe of his abilities; and who but you could be the architect of such wonders? Swiftly you took his life away from the earth, and I recall him with all the more assurance, now that I have nothing to fear for him in boyhood or youth, nor even in full manhood. We had made him one of us, our coeval in your grace, to be brought up in your discipline. We were baptized, and anxiety over our past life fled from us. Nor, during those days, could I be satiated with the wondrous sweetness of contemplating the depth of your counsel for the salvation of mankind. How I wept at the *hymns and sacred songs* (Eph. 5.19) of your Church, how moved was I at its tuneful voices! Those voices flowed in through my ears, and the truth, pressed and strained out of them, entered my heart, and from my heart a pious longing came boiling up and overflowed. My tears ran; I wept, and it was well with me.

9.7.15 It was not long since the Church at Milan had instituted this manner of strengthening and encouraging themselves, with brothers thronging together, full of zeal, singing with voices and

⁵ '... barefoot'. Going barefoot was practised by various Christians at this time, and was not unknown in other religions. It was proscribed by the Council of Saragossa in 380 as typical of the heretical Priscillianist movement, but clearly not universally abandoned. Augustine himself regarded the matter as one of indifference. Alypius, like Augustine, was an African, and would have found North Italy rather cold.

hearts in harmony. There was a year, not much more, during which Justina, mother of the boy king Valentinian, was persecuting Ambrose, the man of God, in the interests of her own heresy; she had been seduced by the Arians. The devout populace mounted watch in the church, ready to die with their bishop, your servant. My mother, your handmaid, was there, and took her stand as one of the foremost in those anxious vigils, living on prayers. I too, though as yet unwarmed by the heat of your Spirit, was none the less excited by the consternation and uproar in the city. It was then that the custom was established of singing hymns and psalms after the Eastern fashion, to keep the people from growing weary and faint-hearted; and the custom then established has been maintained, and many if not all your flocks throughout the rest of the world have imitated it.

9.7.16 Then you revealed to your aforementioned priest in a vision the place where the bodies of the martyrs Protasius and Gervasius lay hidden. These you had kept incorrupt for many long years, hidden away in your secret treasury, from which in due time you would bring them forth to check the madness of a woman, queen though she was. These bodies, once brought to light, were exhumed and transferred with due honour to the Ambrosian Basilica; and as they were being transferred, not only were demoniacs healed, the unclean spirits themselves confessing your power, but also a blind man, a citizen and well known in the city. He, having asked and been told the reason why the populace was in such a tumult of rejoicing, jumped up and asked his guide to take him to the place. He was brought there, and requested and was granted admission to touch with his handkerchief the bier of your saints, whose *death is precious in your sight* (Ps. 116.15 [Ps. 115.15]). He did so; and as soon as he applied the cloth to his eyes, they were opened. Rumour of this deed ran swiftly through the city; fervent and glowing praises were offered up to you for it; and by it the ill intent of that woman, your enemy, if not turned to belief and health, was at least prevented from the madness of persecution. Thanks be to you, my God! From whence and to what purpose have you led my recollection to this point, that I should confess to you these

things also – which, great as they are, I might have forgotten, and passed over? Yet even then, when *the scent of your ointments* was heavy in the air, I did not *run after you* (Song of Songs 1.3). All the more, therefore, did I weep as I heard the hymns chanted, long sighing for you and at last breathing you, so far as a breath can fill this house of straw.

9.8.17 You, who *make men dwell in a house in oneness of mind* (Ps. 68.6 [Ps. 647.7]), had also joined to our number Evodius, a young man from my own town. He had *turned back to you* (Ps. 51.13 [Ps. 50.15]) while serving an Officer of Public Affairs in the Imperial Service,⁶ had been baptized, and, leaving the service of this world, had girt himself up to serve you. We were constantly together, and intended to live together in a holy pact. We considered which place might most profitably contain your servants, and set off together for Africa. While we were at Ostia-on-Tibur, my mother died. There is much that I pass over, as I am in much haste. Accept my confessions and my thanksgivings, O God, for these countless things, even if they remain unspoken. But I shall pass over nothing concerning that servant of yours over which my soul is in travail – she who travailed for me in her flesh, so that I should be born into this temporal light, and in her heart, that I should be born into the light eternal. It is not her gifts that I shall tell, but yours to her. For she neither made herself nor brought herself up; you created her, and neither her father nor her mother knew what manner of woman was coming into being from them. She was brought up *in the fear of you* (Ps. 5.7 [Ps. 5.8]) by the rod of your Christ, the guidance of your only Son, in a faithful house, a sound member of your Church. Nor would she speak so highly of her own mother's attentiveness towards her upbringing as of a servant of hers, a broken-down old woman who had carried her own father on her back, as older girls often carry little children. For this reason, and because of her old age and excellent character, her master and mistress in that Christian household held her in great honour. For the same reasons too she supervised the daughters of the house, diligently exercising the task entrusted

⁶ 'Officer of Public Affairs in the Imperial Service'. See note on 8.6.15.

to her; when the occasion demanded, she could be forthright, rebuking them with a righteous severity and teaching them in sober prudence. For except for the time when they were fed (with the greatest moderation) at their parents' table, she would not let them drink water, even though they were on fire with thirst, in her anxiety to forestall an evil habit. She would add a salutary saying: 'Now you drink water because you do not have wine in your power. But when you come to your husbands and become mistresses of your own storerooms and cellars, water will seem poor stuff; but the habit of drinking will prove too strong.' Thus by reasoned teaching and stern command she checked the greed of youth, and trained the girls' very thirst to keep within a decent measure, and to take no pleasure in anything unseemly.

9.8.18 Nevertheless, it crept up on her – so your maidservant used to tell me, her son – a love of wine crept up on her nevertheless. For when her parents sent her off like a sober-minded girl to draw some wine from the cask, she would dip the cup through the opening at the top, then, before pouring it neat into the flask, she would take the smallest sip, just enough to wet her lips; her senses rebelled at it, and she could take no more. This was not the result of some craving for drink, but, so to speak, of a superabundance of youthful excesses, which boil up in childish hearts in foolish passions, and are usually suppressed by the weight of one's elders. Therefore by adding one nicely measured quantity to another (for *he who spurns due measure perishes little by little*) (Ecclesiasticus 19.1), she had slipped so far into the habit that she could drink off with relish almost whole ladlesful of neat wine. Where then was that canny old woman and her forthright prohibition? For what could prevail against that latent sickness, did not your medicine, O Lord, keep watch over us? Her father and mother and nurses were away, but you were there; you who created her, who call out, who even through 'back-to-front mortals'⁷ work some good for the salvation of

⁷ "back-to-front mortals". This translation is based on the reading *praepositos homines* instead of the manuscripts' *praepositos homines* ('mortals who are set over us'); a reading felt to be unsatisfactory because i) Monica is *not*

souls. What good was it you worked then, my God? Whence did you cure her? Whence did you heal her? Did you not of your hidden providence bring forth from another soul a harsh and cutting rebuke, like a surgeon's knife, and at one stroke cut short the gangrenous part? For the maidservant with whom she usually went to the cask quarrelled with her young mistress, as is the way; and the two of them being alone together, she taxed her with this accusation, and uttered the most bitter insult, calling her Little Miss Topsy. My mother, stung by the lash of these words, contemplated the shameful of her habit, and forthwith rejected it and put it away. Just as friends often corrupt by flattering, so enemies often correct by quarrelling. Nor do you repay them for what you have done through them, but for what they themselves have willed. The maidservant in her anger endeavoured to hit at her young mistress, not to heal her; and she spoke in secret, either because their quarrel had overtaken them in that place and at that time, or so as to avoid danger to herself for having been so slow to inform on her mistress. But you, O Lord, ruler of all dwellers in heaven and earth, turn to your uses the course of that deep torrent, the flow of the world whose very turbulence is ordered; with another soul's sickness you healed her. And let none, on reading this, ascribe it to his own power, if another whom he wishes to have corrected be corrected by a word of his.

9.9.19 So it was that my mother was brought up to be modest and sober, rather put by you in subjection to her parents than by her parents to you; and as soon as 'her years were ripe for marriage',⁸ she was handed over to a husband, whom she *served as her master* (Eph. 5.22, 1Pet. 3.6). She tried anxiously to *win him*

(Continued from previous page.)

corrected by the nurse set over her but by a maidservant, and ii) the 'even' would be redundant if *praepositos* were the correct reading. The phrase *praepositi homines* is taken from Sallust, *Jugurthine War* 86; the plebeian soldier-turned-politician Gaius Marius is rebuking the ineffectual aristocrats who dominated political life for their reliance on book learning and reputation of their ancestors rather than on their own practical experience.

⁸ "years were ripe for marriage". From Virgil, *Aeneid* 7.53 (describing the chaste Lavinia, destined bride of Aeneas).

for you (1Pet. 3.1), speaking of you by her very moral character, by which you made her beautiful and worthy of her husband's reverent love and admiration. His affronts to the marital bed she endured, never having a harsh word with him on that score. She *waited for your loving-kindness upon him* (Ps. 86.15 [Ps. 85.13]); believing in you that he might be made chaste. He, for his part, was as quick to boil up in anger as he was to plunge into acts of friendship. But she had learnt not to resist him when he was angry, not only in deed, but even in word. When she saw that his anger was checked and calmed, and that the time was right, she would give him an account of her own actions, if his outburst had been at all ill-considered. Moreover, when several good ladies, whose husbands were gentler than her own, would, in the course of a friendly conversation, blame their husbands' manner of living for the marks of the blows that they bore – sometimes even marring their features – she would blame the women's tongues. She would point out to them, as if in jest but in fact in all earnestness, that from the moment they heard the marriage contracts read out, they should have regarded them as legal instruments by which they were made maidservants. 'Remember the terms and conditions,' she would say. 'You should not be so arrogant with your lords and masters.' And though the womenfolk were astonished at her, knowing how fierce a husband she endured, it was never heard among them nor made known to them by other means that Patricius beat his wife, nor that any domestic dispute between them had lasted for a whole day. When they asked her, as friends do, the reason for this, she would explain her practice, as I have stated it above. Those who followed it, learnt its worth and thanked her; those who did not, were kept down and suffered for it.

9.9.20 Her mother-in-law, who was at first stirred up against her by the whisperings of their wicked serving women, she won round by her compliant attitude; she persisted in tolerance and docility, until her mother-in-law took the lead in reporting to her son the meddling tongues of their servants, who were disturbing the domestic peace between her and her daughter-in-law, and demanding that they be punished. He, therefore, in

obedience to his mother, taking care for the discipline of his household and consideration for the harmony of his own, punished with blows those thus delated, to the satisfaction of their delator; who thenceforth promised that any serving women who sought her favour by speaking ill in any way to her of her daughter-in-law, should expect similar rewards of her. Thereafter none ventured to do so, and they dwelt in a sweet agreement distinguished by their mutual goodwill.

9.9.21 This great gift also you had bestowed upon that good servant of yours, in whose womb you created me, *O God, my mercy* (Ps. 59.17 [Ps. 58.18]): whenever she could, she would show herself a peacemaker between any souls in dissension and disharmony; so much so that having heard each one say many a harsh word about another – all the eruptions of bloated and bilious discord, when in acidulous colloquy with a friend it brings up great gouts of ill-digested hatred for some absent enemy – she would reveal nothing to one concerning the other, save what might avail to reconcile the two. This would seem a small good to me, had I not had sad experience of countless quarrels; some loathsome, sinful pestilence stalks far and wide, not only disclosing one enemy's angry words to another, but even adding words that were never spoken. It should not be too much for a man, one of human kind, neither to arouse nor increase enmity between men with hard words, if he does not also study to quench this enmity with kind words. Such was my mother, thanks to you, her inner Teacher in the school of her heart.

9.9.22 Last of all she *won for you her husband* (1Pet. 3.1), at the very end of his temporal life; nor, now that he was a baptized believer, did she weep for the conduct which she had tolerated before he believed. She was also the servant of your servants. All of them who knew her praised and glorified and loved you in her, feeling your presence in her heart, attested by the fruits of her holy living (2Pet. 3.11). She had been *the wife of one husband; she had rendered her obligation to her parents; she had kept her house in all piety; her good works bore witness to her. She had brought up her children* (1Tim. 5.4, 9–10), *travailing over them*

(Gal. 4.19) whenever she perceived that they were straying from you. Finally, O Lord – for it is by your gift that I speak – before she fell asleep in you, she tended all of us servants of yours, who were living in fellowship together, having obtained the grace of baptism; she tended us as if she were the mother of all, and served us as if she were the daughter of all.

9.10.23 When the day was at hand when she would leave this life – you knew this day, but we did not – it came about (and this I believe you contrived, working in your hidden ways) that she and I were alone, leaning out of a window that overlooked the courtyard garden of the house that lodged us, there at Ostia-on-Tibur, where after the labours of our long journey we were refreshing ourselves, far from the bustle of the crowds, for our sea voyage. The two of us, then, were alone; and we talked together in all sweetness, forgetful of the past, straining in you, the present Truth, for the things before us. What manner of eternal life awaited the saints, we asked – the life that *eye has not seen nor ear heard, that has not ascended into the heart of man* (1Cor. 2.9)? And in our hearts we thirsted for celestial streams of your fountain, O Fount of Life, the fountain that is in you; that being sprinkled with its waters we might somehow contemplate this great matter, according to our understanding.

9.10.24 When our conversation reached the point at which no pleasure derived from carnal senses, however great, however illumined by bodily light, seemed in respect of the sweetness of that Life worthy not only of comparison, but even of mention, then we raised ourselves up in a more ardent longing for the Same,⁹ moving step by step through all things corporeal, even the sky itself, from which sun and moon and stars shine upon the earth. Still higher we went, through inward contemplation and discussion and admiration of your works. We came to our own minds, and passed beyond them to attain the land of *richness unfailing* (Ezek. 34.14), where you *feed Israel* (Ps. 80.1 [Ps. 79.2]) for ever with the food of truth. There, life is the Wisdom through which all things that were and that are to be

9 'the Same'. Cf note on 9.4.11.

come into being; yet it does not itself come into being, but is as it has been and will always be. And more than that; there is neither past nor future in it, but only being, since it is eternal. And as we talked and thirsted for it, we attained it, according to our small degree, for the space of a whole heartbeat; and sighing we left firmly fixed there the *first-fruits of the Spirit* (Rom. 8.23), and made our way back to the clatter of human speech, where words have a beginning and an ending. But what is like your Word, our Lord, that *abides in itself*, not waxing old but *renewing all things* (Ecclesiasticus 7.27)?

9.10.25 We said, therefore: Let us suppose the tumult of one's flesh were to fall silent, that the vain illusions of earth, waters and air were to fall silent, that the sky were to fall silent. Let us suppose that one's very soul were to fall silent, and, by not thinking about itself, were to transcend itself; suppose all dreams and revelatory images, all tongues and symbols, all that comes to be by passing away were to fall silent – for all these things say to whoever listens, '*We did not make ourselves*' (Ps. 100.2 [Ps. 99.3]); '*our Maker is he who abides for ever*' (Ps. 33.11 [Ps. 32.11], Ps. 117.2 [Ps. 116.2], Is. 40.8, Jn 12.24). Let us suppose that they were to fall silent, having aroused us with these words to listen to their Maker; suppose also that he, the Maker, were to speak – he alone, not through things he has made, but through himself, so that we could hear his word; not through fleshly tongue nor through angel's voice, not through the *sound of the thunder* (Ps. 77.18 [Ps. 76.18]) nor through the riddle of a parable, but suppose we could hear him whom we love for all these things, but without all these things, just as even now we stretched out and with soaring contemplation attained the eternal Wisdom that abides above all things. Let us suppose also that this state were to be prolonged, and that other, far inferior visions were removed, and this one vision were to enrapture and swallow up and hide the beholder in itself, so that life would eternally be as this moment of understanding for which we sighed – would such a state not be what is meant by the words, *Enter into your Master's joy* (Matt. 25.21)? And when shall this be? Will it be when *we all shall rise, but shall not all be transformed* (1Cor. 15.51)?

9.10.26 So we said, if not in this manner and in these words; but *you know, O Lord* (Tobit 8.9, Jn 21.15–16), that as we discussed such matters that day, the world and all its pleasures became to us at our words a thing disprized; and my mother said to me, 'My son, for my part, I no longer take any pleasure in this life. What I am doing here still, and why I am here, I do not know; my hope in this world is spent. There was one thing for which I used to long to remain a while longer in this life – to see you a Catholic Christian, before I died. This my God has bestowed upon me, and more; I see you now his servant, scorning worldly happiness. What am I doing here?'

9.11.27 What I said in reply I cannot recall; for within a mere five days, or not much more, she took to her bed with an attack of fever. One day, as she lay sick, she fell unconscious, and for a short time she was taken away from those present. We all ran into the room, but she was quickly restored to her senses, and catching sight of my brother and me as we stood by her she said, as if puzzled, 'Where was I?' Then, perceiving our grief and consternation, she said, 'You will leave your mother to rest here.' I said nothing, and checked my tears. My brother, however, said something or other, encouraging her to believe that she would die in her homeland and not abroad, as if that were a happier way to die. On hearing this, her face was filled with anxiety, pushing him aside with her eyes for thinking in this way; then, gazing at me, she said, 'See what he says!' Then to both of us she said: 'Leave my body where you will; do not be troubled with any concern on its behalf. One thing only I ask you: that you remember me at the altar of the Lord, wherever you are.' Having framed this sentence in such words as she could, she fell silent, tossed about by the worsening sickness.

9.11.28 I, however, rejoiced as I meditated on your gifts, O God Invisible – the gifts that you put into the hearts of your believers, from which spring such admirable fruits; and I gave thanks to you as I recalled what I knew well – how she had always been in a fever of anxiety about her burial place, which she had appointed and prepared for herself against the time, alongside the body of her husband. For, having lived in great harmony

with him, she wished – so little can the human mind comprehend of things divine! – to add to that happiness; she wished it to be remembered among men that after her travels across the seas it had been granted to her that her dust should be mixed with her husband's, and his with his wife's. When this empty wish had, by *the fulness of your bounty* (Ps. 104.28 [Ps. 103.28], 2Thess. 1.11), begun to retreat from her heart, I did not know, and I was full of wonder and rejoicing that she had shown herself thus to me, even though in our conversation at the window, when she had said, 'What am I doing here?' she had not shown any longing to die in her homeland. I heard, too, later, that while we were at Ostia, she talked one day with certain friends of mine, with the assurance permitted to a mother, on the contempt of this life and benefits of dying. I was not there, but they were astounded at this woman's courage (which you had given her), and had asked whether she was not afraid to leave her body so far from her own city. 'Nothing', she replied, 'is far from God; nor need I fear that at the end of the world he will not know where to raise me up.'

On the ninth day, then, of her illness, in the fifty-sixth year of her life and the thirty-third year of mine, that pious and devout soul was released from her body.

9.12.29 I pressed her eyes shut, and as I did so a great flood of grief flowed into my heart and overflowed in tears. Immediately my eyes, at a forced command of the will, absorbed this fountain and dried up completely; and it was ill with me in that great struggle. Then too, as she breathed her last, the child Adeodatus burst out in lamentation; then, restrained by all the rest of us, fell silent. In this way something childish in me also – the something that was slipping into tears – was checked by the voice of that young heart, and fell silent. For we did not think it proper that her death should be marked with tearful complaints and groans, these being the usual means of bewailing, as it were, the unhappy lot of the dead, their complete snuffing out. But there was nothing unhappy in my mother's death, nor was she dying utterly. This we held to be true by the testimony of her moral character, her unfeigned faith, and by irrefutable reasoning.

9.12.30 What was it, then, that ached so deeply within me, if not the fresh wound that came from the sudden breaking of the habit of living together in all sweetness and love? I rejoiced, it is true, in her testimony; how in her last illness itself, by way of compliment to some service of mine, she would call me a dutiful son, and in the greatness of her love recall that she had never heard my lips cast a hard word or insulting sound at her. But what was the honour I did to her compared to the devoted service that she had rendered me? My soul, therefore, being bereft of the great solace that she had given me, was smitten and, so to speak, stripped of its life – the life that had been made one out of her life and mine.

9.12.31 So it was that when we had checked young Adeodatus's tears, Evodius seized a psaltery and began to sing a psalm. The whole household answered him with the response: *Mercy and judgement shall I sing to you, O Lord* (Ps. 101.1 [Ps. 100.1]). Many of the brothers and many female religious, hearing what was happening, came and joined us. Those whose duty it was to arrange the funeral, did so in the customary way; and I went aside, to a place where I could with propriety speak, and before those who accompanied me, thinking that I should not be left alone, I gave a disputation on a theme suitable to the occasion. Thus with the lotion of truth I soothed my agony – an agony known to you, but unknown to them. They listened intently, and thought that I had no sense of grief. But I rebuked my affection in your ears, where none of them could hear, for its lack of toughness, and checked the flood of sorrow; and gradually it receded from me, only to return, driven by its own momentum. It did not succeed in breaking out in tears, or in changing my countenance; but I knew what I was suppressing in my heart. And being sorely displeased at myself to find that these human traits, which according to the due order and lot of our condition must needs befall us, had such power over me, I grieved with fresh grief for my grief, and was torn by a twofold sadness.

9.12.32 Even when the body was taken out for burial, I went and came back without weeping. Not even in the course of the prayers that we poured out to you, when, according to the

custom of the place, the sacrifice of our ransom price was offered for my mother as her body lay beside the sepulchre,¹⁰ before being laid to rest in it – not even in the course of those prayers did I weep, but all day long I besought you, as best I could, to heal my grief. But you did not heal me, perhaps wishing to impress on my memory how the chain of every habit is opposed to a mind which feeds on the Word in whom there is deceit. I even thought I should take a bath, as I had heard that the baths were so called for this very reason: the Greeks call them *balanion*, because they drive care from the mind.¹¹ This too I confess to your Mercifulness, O *father of the orphans* (Ps. 68.5 [Ps. 67.6]): I took a bath, and after my bath was just as I had been before. The bitterness of grief had not been sweated out of my heart. Then *I slept and woke again* (Ps. 3.5 [Ps. 3.6]), and found my grief greatly lessened; and, as I lay alone in my bed, I recalled those true-spoken verses of your servant Ambrose:

O thou, the All-Creator God,
Guide of the heavens on their road,
Who dost the day with glorious light
Adorn, with grateful sleep the night;
Sleep that the limbs, from toil once more
Refreshed, to labour might restore,
To weary minds might give relief,
And set the mourner free from grief.¹²

9.12.33 From then on, I regained little by little my former perception of your handmaid and her mode of living; her piety towards you, her holy gentleness towards me, her moral recti-

10 '... the sacrifice ... beside the sepulchre'. A celebration of communion. It is notable, in view of much later controversies about the Funeral Mass, that Augustine describes this in similar terms to Monica's celebratory meals at the tombs of the saints in Book Six; that is, as a local custom not in itself to be either recommended or deplored.

11 'the Greeks ... from the mind'. The Latin word for bath, *balneum*, is an old borrowing from the Greek term *balanion*; Augustine is relying on a false etymology of this term as being derived from the Greek *ballo* 'to cast out' and *ania* 'worry, care'.

12 'O thou ... free from grief'. Ambrose, *Hymns* 1.2.1–8

tude. I was destitute of her, and it was a pleasure to weep in your sight over her and for her, over myself and for myself. The tears that I had held back, I gave leave to flow as much as they wanted, spreading them out where my heart could see them; and I found rest in them, for in them were your ears – not the ears of some man, who might look on my weeping with contempt. Even now, O Lord, I confess to you in these writings. Let him who will, read them, and look on them how he will; and if he should find some sin in my weeping for my mother for the least part of an hour – the mother who was for a while dead in my eyes, who had wept for me for so many years, that I might live in your eyes – let him not laugh at me, but rather, if he is full grown in love, let him also weep for my sins to you, the Father of all brothers of your Christ.

9.13.34 For my part, now that the wound caused by my mother's death had been healed (so far as carnal affection can be held in check), I poured out to you, our God, tears of quite another sort for your handmaid: those that flow from a spirit smitten by the contemplation of the perils that face every soul that *in Adam dies*. Although she had been *brought to life in Christ* (1Cor. 15.22), and although, while still not released from the flesh, her life was such as to bring praise to your name for her faith and moral character, nevertheless I would not venture to say that, from the time that you gave her new life in baptism, not one word passed her lips that was contrary to your teaching. For the Truth, your Son, even said: *If a man should say to his brother, 'You fool!' he will be liable to the fire of hell* (Matt. 5.22). And woe even to men who live a praiseworthy life, if you should sift them without mercy! But as you do not enquire relentlessly into our sins, we hope and trust to have some place in you. But if one should enumerate before you his true good deeds, what is he enumerating but your gifts to him? Would that men would learn that they are men, and that *he who boasts would boast in the Lord!* (1Cor. 1.31, 2Cor. 10.17).

9.13.35 So it is, my Praise and my Life, *God of my heart* (Ps. 73.26 [Ps. 72.26]), that I set aside for a little while her good actions, for which I give thanks to you with rejoicing, and now pray to

you for my mother's sins. Hear my prayer, through the Healing of our wounds, who *hung on the Tree* (Deut. 21.23, Gal. 3.13), who, *sitting at the right hand of the Father, intercedes for us* (Ps. 110.1 [Ps. 109.1], Rom. 8.34). I know that she dealt mercifully, and *forgave her debtors from her heart* (Matt. 6.12, 18.35); forgive her also what debts she ran up in all those years after she was washed in the saving waters. *Forgive, Lord, forgive, I pray* (Numbers 14.19); *enter not into judgement* (Ps. 143.2 [Ps. 142.2]) with her. *Let mercy triumph over judgement* (James 2.13), for your sayings are true, and you have promised mercy to the merciful (cf Matt. 5.7). That they are merciful is your gift also; you who have *mercy to those to whom you will have mercy, and are merciful to those to whom you will grant mercy* (Ex. 33.19, Rom. 9.15).

9.13.36 I believe you have indeed already done what I ask of you; but *accept the freewill offerings of my mouth, O Lord* (Ps. 119.108 [Ps. 118.108]). For as the day drew near when she would be released from the flesh, she gave no thought to having her body covered in a sumptuous winding sheet, nor scented with costly perfumes; she did not desire a choice sepulchre, made no provision for burial in her homeland. She placed no such charges upon us, but required only that she should be remembered before your altar, which she had served without letting a day pass. From that altar she knew that the sacred Host was distributed, by which the *record of the debt that stood against us was cancelled* (Col. 2.14-15), by which the Enemy was led captive even as he reckoned up our sins, and sought to make some against him in whom we conquer, and *found no grounds for accusation* (Lk 23.4, Jn 14.30, 18.38, 19.4). Who will repay our Redeemer his innocent blood? Who will restore to him the *price for which he bought us* (1Cor. 6.20, 7.25), to snatch us away from the Enemy? It was to the sacrament of this ransom price that your handmaid bound herself with the bond of faith. Let no one tear her away from your protection. Let not the *lion and the serpent* (Ps. 91.13 [Ps. 90.13]) interpose themselves, be it by force or by guile; for neither will she reply that she owes nothing, and be shown guilty and overcome by the cunning Accuser, but will reply that her *debts have been forgiven* (Matt. 6.12) by

him to whom no one will repay what he, though no debtor, paid for us.

9.13.37 Let her be in peace, then, with her husband, *before and after whom she was married to no one* (1Tim. 5.9) whom she served *bringing profit to you by her patience* (Lk 8.15), and *winning him also for you* (1Pet. 3.1). Inspire, O Lord my God, your servants, my brothers, your children, my masters, whom I serve with heart and voice and pen; inspire them, that all who read these words of mine might remember at your altar your handmaid Monica, with Patricius, her sometime spouse, through whose flesh you brought me into this life; how, I do not know. Let them remember with pious respect my parents in this transitory life, and remember also my brothers, with whom I share you as our Father and the Catholic Church our Mother; they are my fellow-citizens in the *eternal Jerusalem* (Gal. 4.26), for whom your people sigh on their pilgrimage, from their setting out till their returning. And let my mother's last request of me be granted to her more abundantly through the prayers and confessions of many than through my prayers alone.