The Eternal Word and the Restless Mind

(Annotated)

An Augustine Reader on God, Time, Love, and Human Freedom

Selected Writings of
Augustine of Hippo

Selected, Edited, and Introduced by
Douglas C. Youvan

The Eternal Word and the Restless Mind

This volume is a thematic selection from the writings of Augustine of Hippo. Augustine is the author of the historical readings. Douglas C. Youvan is the compiler and editor of this reader. The introductions, reading notes, glossary, and afterword are editorial material, prepared through human-AI collaboration with OpenAI ChatGPT.

The historical English text is drawn from the first series of A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, edited by Philip Schaff, volumes 1, 2, 3, 5, and 7, published in the United States in 1886-1888. The translators and original locations are identified with the readings and in the source register. These historical translations are public domain in the United States. No claim is made to exclusive ownership of their underlying text.

This edition modernizes those historical English translations. It is not presented as an independently completed translation of the entire Latin corpus. Archaic pronouns and verb forms, American spelling, punctuation, and selected sentence constructions have been updated. The modernization retains theological distinctions and historical arguments, including positions with which present readers may disagree. Editorial clarifications within a reading appear in square brackets and are explained in a reading note.

Biblical quotations embedded in Augustine's prose follow the historical translations and are modernized with the surrounding text. They are not identified as quotations from a particular modern copyrighted Bible version. Scripture references and original section numbers provide ways to compare the reading with other editions.

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Preface

Augustine approaches the largest questions through the experience of being human. He asks about God while examining his own desires, about eternity while struggling to understand time, and about truth while acknowledging how little a person may understand himself. His writings move between philosophical argument, biblical interpretation, prayer, confession, and public controversy. Throughout them, the restless mind seeks a reality capable of answering its restlessness.

This reader brings together sustained selections around a central theme: the relationship between the eternal Word and the human life that seeks to understand and follow him. John's declaration that the Word was in the beginning opens an inquiry extending into creation, consciousness, knowledge, love, and conduct. Augustine's reflections on the Logos provide a center from which these subjects can be explored together.

The connection is especially vivid in his treatment of the human word. A thought can exist inwardly before it receives an outward sound. Spoken language communicates something that exceeds its passing syllables. Augustine develops this familiar experience into an analogy through which the mind may approach the divine Word. The analogy preserves a profound difference between human thought, which develops and changes, and the eternal reality toward which it points.

His examination of memory opens another extraordinary field. Within memory, a person encounters images of the world, remembered emotions, acquired knowledge, forgotten experiences, and traces of his own past. Yet the person who possesses this inward abundance cannot fully comprehend himself. Augustine's inquiry into time deepens the problem: the past survives through remembrance, the future approaches through expectation, and the present continually passes. The search for God becomes inseparable from an examination of the mind conducting the search.

These investigations also concern how people live. Augustine considers the divided will, the persistence of destructive habits, the character of evil, and the relationship between freedom and grace. In his homilies on First John, Christian profession is tested through conduct. His discussion of the many antichrists reaches into the Church itself, confronting the possibility that a person may acknowledge Christ in speech while opposing him in action.

The selection also includes Augustine's exercise and defense of religious authority. His arguments for love, unity, and peace stand alongside his acceptance of coercion in the struggle against religious division. These passages

reveal the difficulty of translating spiritual convictions into institutional power. They invite readers to examine both his reasoning and the consequences of the principles he defended.

The readings are arranged by theme, with attention to their historical setting and Augustine's development. Complete chapters and connected passages allow his arguments to unfold. Brief introductions explain the occasion, identify necessary background, and distinguish editorial interpretation from the selected text.

The language is presented in contemporary American English through modernization of identified public-domain English translations. The aim is to preserve Augustine's meaning, theological distinctions, argumentative force, and personal voice while making the prose accessible to present readers. The historical locations of the readings and the source translations are recorded so that readers can compare the edition with its sources.

An encounter with Augustine can begin in recognition and continue through disagreement. His questions about the mind, the will, the passage of time, and the demands of love remain capable of unsettling familiar answers. This reader offers room to hear those questions at length and to consider what following the eternal Word might require of a restless human life.

Augustine: A Life in Context

Augustine was born in 354 at Thagaste in Roman North Africa, in what is now Algeria. His education in language and rhetoric prepared him for the profession of teaching and public speech. His mother, Monica, was Christian; his father, Patricius, became Christian near the end of his life. Augustine's early religious and intellectual commitments developed through a long period of inquiry rather than through a single uninterrupted course of belief.

For years he associated with the Manichaeans, whose account of the conflict between good and evil seemed to address questions that troubled him. He later became dissatisfied with their explanations. Academic skepticism and Platonist writings formed further stages in his search. His work took him from North Africa to Rome and then to Milan, where he heard the preaching of Ambrose. In the Confessions, Augustine interprets these experiences from the standpoint of a later Christian life. The remembered events and the theological understanding of those events are woven together.

The conversion narrated in Book VIII of the Confessions took place in 386. Augustine describes an already convinced mind and a will that continued to postpone a changed life. The episode culminates in his reading a passage from Paul's letter to the Romans. Ambrose baptized Augustine in Milan at Easter in 387, together with his son Adeodatus and his friend Alypius. Monica died at Ostia later that year, while the family was preparing to return to Africa.

After his return, Augustine hoped for a life of study and Christian community. In 391 he was ordained a presbyter at Hippo Regius. He became a bishop in the middle of the 390s and continued in that office until his death in 430. The demands of the office included preaching, correspondence, the interpretation of Scripture, assistance to members of the community, and participation in religious and civic disputes. Those demands help explain the variety of his surviving writings. A sermon to a congregation, a letter to an official, and a long theological treatise address different needs and use different forms of argument.

The North African Church in which Augustine served was divided. The Donatist controversy involved competing accounts of the Church, sacraments, holiness, authority, and the consequences of earlier persecution. Augustine's insistence on unity entered this setting. His letters on religious coercion belong to an actual struggle over churches, laws, property, violence, and allegiance. Their arguments should be read with that setting in view, together with the voices of the opponents that his own texts report.

Another major controversy concerned grace and human choice. Augustine opposed teachings associated with Pelagius and his followers that he believed

attributed too much to unaided human capacity. His later treatments place increasing emphasis on the divine gift enabling a good will and a faithful life. He also continued to insist that commands, choices, responsibility, and prayer have meaning. The resulting tensions are present in the selections themselves and are not resolved by making all periods of his work sound alike.

Augustine's books on the Trinity, his sermons on John, and his meditations on memory and time develop alongside these practical and doctrinal concerns. They are parts of one active life, though they do not form a single finished system. Near the end of his career, he reviewed many of his writings in the Retractations, also called Revisions. That work testifies to his practice of reconsidering formulations and correcting earlier judgments.

He died at Hippo in 430 while the city was under siege by the Vandals. His writings continued to circulate through manuscripts, libraries, schools, monasteries, and later printed editions. This reader draws a thematic path through that inheritance. It gives priority to arguments that connect the Word, the inward life, moral action, and public authority, while retaining enough setting to make the selected passages intelligible.

Selected Chronology

354 Born at Thagaste in Roman North Africa.

370s-380s Teaches rhetoric and pursues religious and philosophical questions, including a long association with the Manichaeans.

384 Moves to Milan as a teacher of rhetoric and hears Ambrose preach.

386 The conversion recounted in Confessions VIII.

387 Baptized by Ambrose at Milan; Monica dies at Ostia later that year.

388 Returns to North Africa.

391 Ordained a presbyter at Hippo Regius.

395-396 Becomes a bishop at Hippo.

About 397-400 Composes the Confessions.

Early fifth century Preaches the selected homilies and tractates on John and First John; works on the Trinity.

413-426 Composes The City of God.

Later 420s Writes the selected later works on grace and reviews earlier writings in the Retractations.

430 Dies at Hippo on August 28.

How to Read This Book

The eight parts of this book form a thematic sequence. They begin with the search that Augustine remembers, move through the Word and the inward life, examine time and moral agency, and then turn to conduct, authority, peace, and hope. A reader may follow that sequence or begin with a particular subject. The chapter introductions supply the immediate setting for the readings that follow.

Each chapter opens with editorial prose. The heading Augustine introduces the historical readings. A source line identifies the work and the original location. Numbered source sections are preserved where the translation supplies them. The chapters in this reader have their own numbers from 1 to 24; those numbers are distinct from the books, chapters, and sections of Augustine's works. The source register at the back of the volume records those original locations for comparison.

Where a source is excerpted in several separated ranges, each range receives its own reading heading and source line. A continuous sequence within a reading follows the historical order. A change in reading therefore marks a change of source or location; readers are not asked to assume that separated passages were originally adjacent. Original chapter headings may be represented by the reading title and location rather than repeated above every paragraph.

The prose comes from several nineteenth-century translators. Their styles differed, as did the genres they translated. This edition gives them consistent American spelling and removes many archaic grammatical forms, but it retains the difference between a prayer, a sermon, a letter, and a treatise. Augustine's repetitions sometimes carry the argument or reproduce the movement of spoken preaching. They remain where the selected sequence needs them.

Technical terms deserve patient attention. Word can mean a spoken sound, a thought understood inwardly, a scriptural utterance, or the divine Word. Nature, substance, person, use, enjoyment, grace, and love also have particular roles within an argument. The glossary explains recurring senses without replacing the context in which a term occurs. When Augustine uses an analogy, its stated limits are part of its meaning.

Augustine's references to the catholic Church belong to his historical account of the universal Church and its communion. His labels for religious opponents express his own judgments. A letter defending coercion is presented as his argument, with an introduction explaining its occasion. An editorial description of that argument does not turn its premises into an unqualified judgment on the people it addresses.

The final source register identifies the historical translations. The biblical passage index connects references identified in those source editions with the chapters of this reader. It is a finding aid, not a claim to list every possible scriptural echo. Scripture can also be located through the original work and section number.

Readers can return to three questions throughout the volume. What distinction is Augustine making? What example or text supports it? What follows for the life of a person or a community? These questions keep the reflective and practical strands of the book together.

PART I

The Restless Search

Augustine's search is told from the standpoint of a later life. The narrator knows the direction in which his earlier uncertainties will lead, but he preserves much of their difficulty. Intellectual conviction and a changed way of living emerge at different moments. One may recognize an argument as true while continuing to desire a life that resists it.

The selections in this part follow three movements. First comes a struggle to imagine divine reality without making it another extended body. Augustine then encounters philosophical writings that help him think beyond material substance, and tests what they disclose against the humility and mediation he finds in Christ. Next comes the more intimate problem of the will: he can see a possible life and still postpone it. Finally he describes the crisis of conversion and the ordinary decisions that follow it, including withdrawal from teaching, friendship, study, and baptism.

These episodes introduce the reader to Augustine's characteristic method. Philosophical questions are worked through in a life; remembered events become occasions for examining intention; and prayer continually turns analysis into an address to God. The later thematic parts return to the issues opened here in a more sustained form.

CHAPTER 1

Seeking Wisdom

Augustine begins with a difficulty of imagination. He believes that God is incorruptible, yet the images available to him continue to give reality a bodily shape. Something that occupies no space seems to him scarcely distinguishable from nothing. The problem is philosophical, but it also concerns the habits by which a person mistakes a familiar image for a necessary condition of existence.

The first reading preserves his statement of that problem and the challenge his friend Nebridius puts to the Manichaean account of a divine struggle with evil. The second begins later in the same book, when Augustine describes finding books of the Platonists in Latin translation. Those writings allow him to think of an intelligible reality beyond bodily form. He recognizes correspondences with the opening of John's Gospel and also marks what he does not find there: the Word's becoming flesh and the path of humility by which the wounded human will can be healed.

The intervening chapters of Book VII are omitted; their discussions of responsibility, astrology, and evil belong to the larger narrative. The retained sequences are complete at the chapter level. Read together, they show both the power and the limits Augustine attributes to intellectual ascent. He credits a real philosophical discovery while continuing to ask how insight becomes a durable way of life. The passage ends by turning toward the scriptural writings through which he believes the discoveries can be rightly understood.

Augustine

Imagining God and Questioning a Cosmic Conflict

Confessions · Book VII, chapters I–II

Dead now was that evil and abominable youth of mine, and I was passing into early manhood: as I increased in years, the fouler became I in vanity, who could not conceive of any substance but such as I saw with my own eyes. I thought not of You, O God, under the form of a human body. Since the time I began to hear something of wisdom, I always avoided this; and I rejoiced to have found the same in the faith of our spiritual mother, Your Catholic Church. But what else to imagine You I knew not. And I, a man, and such a man, sought to conceive of You, the sovereign and only true God; and I did in my inmost heart believe that You were incorruptible, and inviolable, and unchangeable; because, not knowing from where or how, yet most plainly did I see and feel sure that that which may be corrupted must be worse than that which cannot, and what cannot be violated

did I without hesitation prefer before that which can, and deemed that which suffers no change to be better than that which is changeable.

Violently did my heart cry out against all my phantasms, and with this one blow I endeavored to beat away from the eye of my mind all that unclean crowd which fluttered around it. And look, being scarce put off, they, in the twinkling of an eye, pressed in multitudes around me, dashed against my face, and beclouded it; so that, though I thought not of You under the form of a human body, yet was I constrained to image You to be something corporeal in space, either infused into the world, or infinitely diffused beyond it,—even that incorruptible, inviolable, and unchangeable, which I preferred to the corruptible, and violable, and changeable; since whatever I conceived, deprived of this space, appeared as nothing to me, yes, altogether nothing, not even a void, as if a body were removed from its place and the place should remain empty of any body at all, whether earthy, terrestrial, watery, aerial, or celestial, but should remain a void place—a spacious nothing, as it were.

I therefore being thus gross-hearted, nor clear even to myself, whatever was not stretched over certain spaces, nor diffused, nor crowded together, nor swelled out, or which did not or could not receive some of these dimensions, I judged to be altogether nothing. For over such forms as my eyes are wont to range did my heart then range; nor did I see that this same observation, by which I formed those same images, was not of this kind, and yet it could not have formed them had not itself been something great. In like manner did I conceive of You, Life of my life, as vast through infinite spaces, on every side penetrating the whole mass of the world, and beyond it, all ways, through immeasurable and boundless spaces; so that the earth should have You, the heaven have You, all things have You, and they bounded in You, but You nowhere. For as the body of this air which is above the earth prevents not the light of the sun from passing through it, penetrating it, not by bursting or by cutting, but by filling it entirely, so I imagined the body, not of heaven, air, and sea only, but of the earth also, to be pervious to You, and in all its greatest parts as well as smallest penetrable to receive Your presence, by a secret inspiration, both inwardly and outwardly governing all things which You have created.

So I conjectured, because I was unable to think of anything else; for it was untrue. For in this way would a greater part of the earth contain a greater portion of You, and the less a lesser; and all things should so be full of You, as that the body of an elephant should contain more of You than that of a sparrow by how much larger it is, and occupies more room; and so should You make the portions of Yourself present to the several portions of the world, in pieces, great to the great, little to the little. But You are not such a one; nor had You as yet enlightened my darkness.

It was sufficient for me, O Lord, to oppose to those deceived deceivers and dumb praters (dumb, since Your word sounded not forth from them) that which a long while ago, while we were at Carthage, Nebridius used to propound, at which all we who heard it were disturbed: “What could that reputed nation of darkness, which the Manichaeans are in the habit of setting up as a mass opposed to You, have done to You had You objected to fight with it? For had it been answered, ‘It would have done You some injury,’ then should You be subject to violence and corruption; but if the reply were: ‘It could do You no injury,’ then was no cause assigned for Your fighting with it; and so fighting as that a certain portion and member of You, or offspring of Your very substance, should be blended with adverse powers and natures not of Your creation, and be by them corrupted and deteriorated to such an extent as to be turned from happiness into misery, and need help by which it might be delivered and purged; and that this offspring of Your substance was the soul, to which, being enslaved, contaminated, and corrupted, Your word, free, pure, and entire, might bring help; but yet also the word itself being corruptible, because it was from one and the same substance.

So that should they affirm You, whatever You are, that is, Your substance by which You are, to be incorruptible, then were all these assertions false and execrable; but if corruptible, then that were false, and at the first utterance to be abhorred.” This argument, then, was enough against those who wholly merited to be vomited forth from the surfeited stomach, since they had no means of escape without horrible sacrilege, both of heart and tongue, thinking and speaking such things of You.

The Platonists, the Word, and the Way of Humility

Confessions · Book VII, chapters IX–XXI

And You, willing first to show me how You “resist the proud, but give grace to the humble” and by how great an act of mercy You had pointed out to men the path of humility, in that Your “Word was made flesh” and dwelt among men,—You procured for me, by the instrumentality of one inflated with most monstrous pride, certain books of the Platonists, translated from Greek into Latin. And in it I read, not indeed in the same words, but to the selfsame effect, enforced by many and divers reasons, that, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made.” That which was made by Him is “life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in darkness; and the darkness comprehends it not.” And that the soul of man, though it “bears witness of the light,” yet itself “is not that light; but the Word of God, being God, is that true light that lights every man that comes into the world.” And that “He was in the world, and the world was

made by Him, and the world knew Him not." But that "He came to His own, and His own received Him not.

But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name." This I did not read there.

In like manner, I read there that God the Word was born not of flesh, nor of blood, nor of the will of man, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God. But that "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us," I read not there. For I discovered in those books that it was in many and divers ways said, that the Son was in the form of the Father, and "thought it not robbery to be equal with God," for that naturally He was the same substance. But that He emptied Himself, "and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him" from the dead, "and given Him a name above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father;" those books have not.

For that before all times, and above all times, Your only-begotten Son remains unchangeably co-eternal with You; and that of "His fullness" souls receive, that they may be blessed; and that by participation of the wisdom remaining in them they are renewed, that they may be wise, is there. But that "in due time Christ died for the ungodly," and that You spared not Your only Son, but delivered Him up for us all, is not there. "Because You have hid these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them to babes;" that they "that labor and are heavy laden" might "come" to Him and He might refresh them, because He is "meek and lowly in heart." "The meek will He guide in judgment; and the meek will He teach His way;" looking upon our humility and our distress, and forgiving all our sins. But such as are puffed up with the elation of would-be sublimer learning, do not hear Him saying, "Learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest to your souls." "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools."

And therefore also did I read there, that they had changed the glory of Your incorruptible nature into idols and divers forms,—"into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things," namely, into that Egyptian food for which Esau lost his birthright; for that Your first-born people worshiped the head of a four-footed beast instead of You, turning back in heart towards Egypt, and prostrating Your image—their own soul—before the image "of an ox that eats grass." These things found I there; but I fed not on them. For it pleased You, O Lord, to take away the reproach of

diminution from Jacob, that the elder should serve the younger; and You have called the Gentiles into Your inheritance. And I had come to You from among the Gentiles, and I strained after that gold which You willed Your people to take from Egypt, seeing that wherever it was it was Yours. And to the Athenians You said by Your apostle, that in You “we live, and move, and have our being;” as one of their own poets has said. And verily these books came from there. But I set not my mind on the idols of Egypt, whom they ministered to with Your gold, “who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator.”

And being from there warned to return to myself, I entered into my inward self, You leading me on; and I was able to do it, for You were become my helper. And I entered, and with the eye of my soul (such as it was) saw above the same eye of my soul, above my mind, the Unchangeable Light. Not this common light, which all flesh may look upon, nor, as it were, a greater one of the same kind, as though the brightness of this should be much more resplendent, and with its greatness fill up all things. Not like this was that light, but different, yes, very different from all these. Nor was it above my mind as oil is above water, nor as heaven above earth; but above it was, because it made me, and I below it, because I was made by it. He who knows the Truth knows that Light; and he that knows it knows eternity. Love knows it. O Eternal Truth, and true Love, and loved Eternity! You are my God; to You do I sigh both night and day.

When I first knew You, You lifted me up, that I might see there was that which I might see, and that yet it was not I that did see. And You did beat back the infirmity of my sight, pouring forth upon me most strongly Your beams of light, and I trembled with love and fear; and I found myself to be far off from You, in the region of dissimilarity, as if I heard this voice of Your from on high: “I am the food of strong men; grow, and you shall feed upon me; nor shall you convert me, like the food of your flesh, into you, but you shall be converted into me.” And I learned that You for iniquity do correct man, and You do make my soul to consume away like a spider. And I said, “Is Truth, therefore, nothing because it is neither diffused through space, finite, nor infinite?” And You cried to me from afar, “Yes, verily, ‘I Am that I Am.’” And I heard this, as things are heard in the heart, nor was there room for doubt; and I should more readily doubt that I live than that Truth is not, which is “clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.”

And I viewed the other things below You, and perceived that they neither altogether are, nor altogether are not. They are, indeed, because they are from You; but are not, because they are not what You are. For that truly is which remains immutably. It is good, then, for me to cleave to God, for if I remain not in Him, neither shall I in myself; but He, remaining in Himself, renews all things. And You are the Lord my God, since You stand not in need of my goodness.

And it was made clear to me that those things are good which yet are corrupted, which, neither were they supremely good, nor unless they were good, could be corrupted; because if supremely good, they were incorruptible, and if not good at all, there was nothing in them to be corrupted. For corruption harms, but, less it could diminish goodness, it could not harm. Either, then, corruption harms not, which cannot be; or, what is most certain, all which is corrupted is deprived of good. But if they be deprived of all good, they will cease to be. For if they be, and cannot be at all corrupted, they will become better, because they shall remain incorruptibly. And what more monstrous than to assert that those things which have lost all their goodness are made better? Therefore, if they shall be deprived of all good, they shall no longer be. So long, therefore, as they are, they are good; therefore whatever is, is good. That evil, then, which I sought from where it was, is not any substance; for were it a substance, it would be good.

For either it would be an incorruptible substance, and so a chief good, or a corruptible substance, which unless it were good it could not be corrupted. I perceived, therefore, and it was made clear to me, that You did make all things good, nor is there any substance at all that was not made by You; and because all that You have made are not equal, therefore all things are; because individually they are good, and altogether very good, because our God made all things very good.

And to You is there nothing at all evil, and not only to You, but to Your whole creation; because there is nothing without which can break in, and mar that order which You have appointed it. But in the parts of it, some things, because they harmonize not with others, are considered evil; whereas those very things harmonize with others, and are good, and in themselves are good. And all these things which do not harmonize together harmonize with the inferior part which we call earth, having its own cloudy and windy sky concordant to it. Far be it from me, then, to say, “These things should not be.” For should I see nothing but these, I should indeed desire better; but yet, if only for these, ought I to praise You; for that You are to be praised is shown from the “earth, dragons, and all deeps; fire, and hail; snow, and vapors; stormy winds fulfilling Your word; mountains, and all hills; fruitful trees, and all cedars; beasts, and all cattle; creeping things, and flying fowl; kings of the earth, and all people; princes, and all judges of the earth; both young men and maidens; old men and children,” praise Your name.

But when, “from the heavens,” these praise You, praise You, our God, “in the heights,” all Your “angels,” all Your “hosts,” “sun and moon,” all you stars and light, “the heavens of heavens,” and the “waters that be above the heavens,” praise Your name. I did not now desire better things, because I was thinking of

all; and with a better judgment I reflected that the things above were better than those below, but that all were better than those above alone.

There is no wholeness in them whom anything of Your creation displeased no more than there was in me, when many things which You made displeased me. And, because my soul dared not be displeased at my God, it would not suffer anything to be Your which displeased it. Hence it had gone into the opinion of two substances, and resisted not, but talked foolishly. And, returning from there, it had made to itself a god, through infinite measures of all space; and imagined it to be You, and placed it in its heart, and again had become the temple of its own idol, which was to You an abomination. But after You had fomented the head of me unconscious of it, and closed my eyes lest they should “look at vanity,” I ceased from myself a little, and my madness was lulled to sleep; and I awoke in You, and saw You to be infinite, though in another way; and this sight was not derived from the flesh.

And I looked back on other things, and I perceived that it was to You they owed their being, and that they were all bounded in You; but in another way, not as being in space, but because You hold all things in Your hand in truth: and all things are true so far as they have a being; nor is there any falsehood, unless that which is not is thought to be. And I saw that all things harmonized, not with their places only, but with their seasons also. And that You, who only are eternal, did not begin to work after innumerable spaces of times; for that all spaces of times, both those which have passed and which shall pass, neither go nor come, save through You, working and abiding.

And I discerned and found it no marvel, that bread which is distasteful to an unhealthy palate is pleasant to a healthy one; and that the light, which is painful to sore eyes, is delightful to sound ones. And Your righteousness displeases the wicked; much more the viper and little worm, which You have created good, fitting in with inferior parts of Your creation; with which the wicked themselves also fit in, the more in proportion as they are unlike You, but with the superior creatures, in proportion as they become like to You. And I inquired what iniquity was, and ascertained it not to be a substance, but a perversion of the will, bent aside from You, O God, the Supreme Substance, towards these lower things, and casting out its bowels, and swelling outwardly.

And I marveled that I now loved You, and no phantasm instead of You. And yet I did not merit to enjoy my God, but was transported to You by Your beauty, and presently torn away from You by my own weight, sinking with grief into these inferior things. This weight was carnal custom. Yet was there a remembrance of You with me; nor did I any way doubt that there was one to whom I might cleave, but that I was not yet one who could cleave to You; for that the body which is corrupted presses down the soul, and the earthly dwelling weighs down the mind which thinks upon many things. And most certain I was that Your “invisible

things from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even Your eternal power and Godhead." For, inquiring from where it was that I admired the beauty of bodies whether celestial or terrestrial, and what supported me in judging correctly on things mutable, and pronouncing, "This should be thus, this not,"—inquiring, then, from where I so judged, seeing I did so judge, I had found the unchangeable and true eternity of Truth, above my changeable mind.

And thus, by degrees, I passed from bodies to the soul, which makes use of the senses of the body to perceive; and from there to its inward faculty, to which the bodily senses represent outward things, and up to which reach the capabilities of beasts; and from there, again, I passed on to the reasoning faculty, to which whatever is received from the senses of the body is referred to be judged, which also, finding itself to be variable in me, raised itself up to its own intelligence, and from habit drew away my thoughts, withdrawing itself from the crowds of contradictory phantasms; that so it might find out that light by which it was besprinkled, when, without all doubting, it cried out, "that the unchangeable was to be preferred before the changeable;" from where also it knew that unchangeable, which, unless it had in some way known, it could have had no sure ground for preferring it to the changeable. And thus, with the flash of a trembling glance, it arrived at that which is. And then I saw Your invisible things understood by the things that are made.

But I was not able to fix my gaze on it; and my infirmity being beaten back, I was thrown again on my accustomed habits, carrying along with me nothing but a loving memory of it, and an appetite for what I had, as it were, smelled the odor of, but was not yet able to eat.

And I sought a way of acquiring strength sufficient to enjoy You; but I found it not until I embraced that "Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus," "who is over all, God blessed for ever," calling to me, and saying, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," and mingling that food which I was unable to receive with our flesh. For "the Word was made flesh," that Your wisdom, by which You created all things, might provide milk for our infancy. For I did not grasp my Lord Jesus,—I, though humbled, grasped not the humble One; nor did I know what lesson that infirmity of His would teach us. For Your Word, the Eternal Truth, pre-eminent above the higher parts of Your creation, raises up those that are subject to Itself; but in this lower world built for Itself a humble habitation of our clay, by which He intended to abase from themselves such as would be subjected and bring them over to Himself, allaying their swelling, and fostering their love; to the end that they might go on no further in self-confidence, but rather should become weak, seeing before their feet the Divinity weak by taking our "coats of skins;" and wearied, might cast themselves down upon It, and It rising, might lift them up.

But I thought differently, thinking only of my Lord Christ as of a man of excellent wisdom, to whom no man could be equalled; especially for that, being wonderfully born of a virgin, He seemed, through the divine care for us, to have attained so great authority of leadership,—for an example of contemning temporal things for the obtaining of immortality. But what mystery there was in, "The Word was made flesh," I could not even imagine. Only I had learned out of what is delivered to us in writing of Him, that He did eat, drink, sleep, walk, rejoice in spirit, was sad, and discoursed; that flesh alone did not cleave to Your Word, but with the human soul and body. All know thus who know the unchangeableness of Your Word, which I now knew as well as I could, nor did I at all have any doubt about it. For, now to move the limbs of the body at will, now not; now to be stirred by some affection, now not; now by signs to enunciate wise sayings, now to keep silence, are properties of a soul and mind subject to change.

And should these things be falsely written of Him, all the rest would risk the imputation, nor would there remain in those books any saving faith for the human race. Since, then, they were written truthfully, I acknowledged a perfect man to be in Christ—not the body of a man only, nor with the body a sensitive soul without a rational, but a very man; whom, not only as being a form of truth, but for a certain great excellency of human nature and a more perfect participation of wisdom, I decided was to be preferred before others. But Alypius imagined the Catholics to believe that God was so clothed with flesh, that, besides God and flesh, there was no soul in Christ, and did not think that a human mind was ascribed to Him. And, because He was thoroughly persuaded that the actions which were recorded of Him could not be performed except by a vital and rational creature, he moved the more slowly towards the Christian faith. But, learning afterwards that this was the error of the Apollinarian heretics, he rejoiced in the Catholic faith, and was conformed to it.

But somewhat later it was, I confess, that I learned how in the sentence, "The Word was made flesh," the Catholic truth can be distinguished from the falsehood of Photinus. For the disapproval of heretics makes the tenets of Your Church and sound doctrine to stand out boldly. For there must be also heresies, that the approved may be made manifest among the weak.

But having then read those books of the Platonists, and being admonished by them to search for incorporeal truth, I saw Your invisible things, understood by those things that are made; and though repulsed, I perceived what that was, which through the darkness of my mind I was not allowed to contemplate,—assured that You were, and were infinite, and yet not diffused in space finite or infinite; and that You truly are, who are the same ever, varying neither in part nor motion; and that all other things are from You, on this most sure ground alone, that they are. Of these things was I indeed assured, yet too weak to enjoy

You. I chattered as one well skilled; but had I not sought Your way in Christ our Savior, I would have proved not skillful, but ready to perish. For now, filled with my punishment, I had begun to desire to seem wise; yet mourned I not, but rather was puffed up with knowledge. For where was that love building upon the "foundation" of humility, "which is Jesus Christ"?

Or, when would these books teach me it? Upon these, therefore, I believe, it was Your pleasure that I should fall before I studied Your Scriptures, that it might be impressed on my memory how I was affected by them; and that afterwards when I was subdued by Your books, and when my wounds were touched by Your healing fingers, I might discern and distinguish what a difference there is between presumption and confession,—between those who saw to where they were to go, yet saw not the way, and the way which leads not only to see but to inhabit the blessed country. For had I first been molded in Your Holy Scriptures, and had You, in the familiar use of them, grown sweet to me, and had I afterwards fallen upon those volumes, they might perhaps have withdrawn me from the solid ground of piety; or, had I stood firm in that wholesome disposition which I had from there imbibed, I might have thought that it could have been attained by the study of those books alone.

Most eagerly, then, did I seize that venerable writing of Your Spirit, but more especially the Apostle Paul; and those difficulties vanished away, in which he at one time appeared to me to contradict himself, and the text of his discourse not to agree with the testimonies of the Law and the Prophets. And the face of that pure speech appeared to me one and the same; and I learned to "rejoice with trembling." So I commenced, and found that whatever truth I had there read was declared here with the recommendation of Your grace; that he who sees may not so glory as if he had not received not only that which he sees, but also that he can see (for what has he which he has not received?); and that he may not only be admonished to see You, who are ever the same, but also may be healed, to hold You; and that he who from afar off is not able to see, may still walk on the way by which he may reach, behold, and possess You.

For though a man "delight in the law of God after the inward man," what shall he do with that other law in his members which wars against the law of his mind, and brings him into captivity to the law of sin, which is in his members? For You are righteous, O Lord, but we have sinned and committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and Your hand is grown heavy upon us, and we are justly delivered over to that ancient sinner, the governor of death; for he induced our will to be like his will, by which he remained not in Your truth. What shall "wretched man" do? "Who shall deliver him from the body of this death," but Your grace only, "through Jesus 'Christ our Lord,'" whom You have begotten co-eternal, and created in the beginning of Your ways, in whom the Prince of this world found nothing worthy of death, yet killed he Him, and the handwriting

which was contrary to us was blotted out? This those writings contain not. Those pages contain not the expression of this piety,—the tears of confession, Your sacrifice, a troubled spirit, “a broken and a contrite heart,” the salvation of the people, the espoused city, the earnest of the Holy Spirit, the cup of our redemption.

No man sings there, Shall not my soul be subject to God? For of Him comes my salvation, for He is my God and my salvation, my defender, I shall not be further moved. No one there hears Him calling, “Come to me all you that labor.” They scorn to learn of Him, because He is meek and lowly of heart; for “You have hid those things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them to babes.” For it is one thing, from the mountain’s wooded summit to see the land of peace, and not to find the way there,—in vain to attempt impassable ways, opposed and waylaid by fugitives and deserters, under their captain the “lion” and the “dragon;” and another to keep to the way that leads there, guarded by the host of the heavenly general, where they rob not who have deserted the heavenly army, which they shun as torture. These things did in a wonderful manner sink into my bowels, when I read that “least of Your apostles,” and had reflected upon Your works, and feared greatly.

Reading Notes

1. The source selection moves from VII.2 to VII.9. Chapters VII.3–8 are not reproduced.

2. The books of the Platonists are the philosophical writings Augustine says he encountered in Latin translation. This selection preserves his own comparison between their teaching and the Gospel.

CHAPTER 2

The Divided Heart

The obstacle in this chapter is no longer simply the inability to conceive an immaterial reality. Augustine describes a mind persuaded that a different life is possible and a will that repeatedly delays it. His account gives desire a history. Habits acquired through earlier choices become forces that seem to demand the continuation of those choices.

Other people's lives enter the argument. The story related by Ponticianus, including the conversion of imperial officials after reading the life of Antony, makes Augustine's own postponement newly difficult to defend. He experiences comparison as exposure: people with fewer intellectual advantages have acted, while he continues to use inquiry as a reason for waiting. His shame then opens into a close examination of the divided will.

The selected sequence runs through six complete chapters of Book VIII. Augustine describes bodily agitation and inward conflict, asks why the mind's command over itself differs from its command over a limb, and rejects the claim that conflicting impulses prove the existence of two opposed spiritual substances. He understands the division as a disorder within one person.

Readers may find the intensity of the narrative inseparable from Augustine's ascetic understanding of conversion. He is considering a concrete renunciation, including his expectations of marriage and public advancement. The psychological analysis should therefore be read within the life he is describing. Its broader interest lies in the relation between judgment, desire, habit, responsibility, and action, rather than in an assumption that every reader's choices must reproduce his.

Augustine

Habit, Example, and the Will Divided Against Itself

Confessions · Book VIII, chapters V–X

But when that man of Yours, Simplicianus, related this to me about Victorinus, I burned to imitate him; and it was for this end he had related it. But when he had added this also, that in the time of the Emperor Julian, there was a law made by which Christians were forbidden to teach grammar and oratory, and he, in obedience to this law, chose rather to abandon the wordy school than Your word, by which You make eloquent the tongues of the dumb,—he appeared to me not more brave than happy, in having thus discovered an opportunity of waiting on You only, which thing I was sighing for, thus bound, not with the irons of another, but my own iron will. My will was the enemy master of, and from there

had made a chain for me and bound me. Because of a perverse will was lust made; and lust indulged in became custom; and custom not resisted became necessity. By which links, as it were, joined together (which is why I term it a “chain”), did a hard bondage hold me enthralled.

But that new will which had begun to develope in me, freely to worship You, and to wish to enjoy You, O God, the only sure enjoyment, was not able as yet to overcome my former wilfulness, made strong by long indulgence. Thus did my two wills, one old and the other new, one carnal, the other spiritual, contend within me; and by their discord they unstrung my soul.

Thus came I to understand, from my own experience, what I had read, how that “the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.” I verily lusted both ways; yet more in that which I approved in myself, than in that which I disapproved in myself. For in this last it was now rather not “I,” because in much I rather suffered against my will than did it willingly. And yet it was through me that custom became more combative against me, because I had come willingly to where I willed not. And who, then, can with any justice speak against it, when just punishment follows the sinner? Nor had I now any longer my wonted excuse, that as yet I hesitated to be above the world and serve You, because my perception of the truth was uncertain; for now it was certain. But I, still bound to the earth, refused to be Your soldier; and was as much afraid of being freed from all embarrassments, as we ought to fear to be embarrassed.

Thus with the baggage of the world was I sweetly burdened, as when in slumber; and the thoughts in which I meditated upon You were like to the efforts of those desiring to awake, who, still overpowered with a heavy drowsiness, are again steeped in it. And as no one desires to sleep always, and in the sober judgment of all waking is better, yet does a man generally defer to shake off drowsiness, when there is a heavy lethargy in all his limbs, and, though displeased, yet even after it is time to rise with pleasure yields to it, so was I assured that it were much better for me to give up myself to Your love, than to yield myself to my own cupidity; but the former course satisfied and vanquished me, the latter pleased me and fettered me. Nor had I anything to answer You calling to me, “Awake, you that sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light.” And to You showing me on every side, that what You said was true, I, convicted by the truth, had nothing at all to reply, but the drawling and drowsy words: “Presently, look, presently;” “Leave me a little while.” But “presently, presently,” had no present; and my “leave me a little while” went on for a long while.

In vain did I “delight in Your law after the inner man,” when “another law in my members warred against the law of my mind, and brought me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.” For the law of sin is the violence of custom, by which the mind is drawn and held, even against its will; deserving to

be so held in that it so willingly falls into it. “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death” but Your grace only, through Jesus Christ our Lord?

And how, then, You did deliver me out of the bonds of carnal desire, with which I was most firmly fettered, and out of the drudgery of worldly business, will I now declare and confess to Your name, “O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.” Amid increasing anxiety, I was transacting my usual affairs, and daily sighing to You. I resorted as frequently to Your church as the business, under the burden of which I groaned, left me free to do. Alypius was with me, being after the third sitting disengaged from his legal occupation, and awaiting further opportunity of selling his counsel, as I was wont to sell the power of speaking, if it can be supplied by teaching. But Nebridius had, on account of our friendship, consented to teach under Verecundus, a citizen and a grammarian of Milan, and a very intimate friend of us all; who vehemently desired, and by the right of friendship demanded from our company, the faithful aid he greatly stood in need of. Nebridius, then, was not drawn to this by any desire of gain (for he could have made much more of his learning had he been so inclined), but, as a most sweet and kindly friend, he would not be wanting in an office of friendliness, and slight our request.

But in this he acted very discreetly, taking care not to become known to those personages whom the world esteems great; thus avoiding distraction of mind, which he desired to have free and at leisure as many hours as possible, to search, or read, or hear something concerning wisdom.

Upon a certain day, then, Nebridius being away (why, I do not remember), look, there came to the house to see Alypius and me, Pontitianus, a countryman of ours, in so far as he was an African, who held high office in the emperor’s court. What he wanted with us I know not, but we sat down to talk together, and it fell out that upon a table before us, used for games, he noticed a book; he took it up, opened it, and, contrary to his expectation, found it to be the Apostle Paul, —for he imagined it to be one of those books which I was wearing myself out in teaching. At this he looked up at me smilingly, and expressed his delight and wonder that he had so unexpectedly found this book, and this only, before my eyes. For he was both a Christian and baptized, and often prostrated himself before You our God in the church, in constant and daily prayers. When, then, I had told him that I bestowed much pains upon these writings, a conversation ensued on his speaking of Antony, the Egyptian monk, whose name was in high repute among Your servants, though up to that time not familiar to us.

When he came to know this, he lingered on that topic, imparting to us a knowledge of this man so eminent, and marvelling at our ignorance. But we were amazed, hearing Your wonderful works most fully manifested in times so recent, and almost in our own, worked in the true faith and the Catholic Church.

We all wondered—we, that they were so great, and he, that we had never heard of them.

From this his conversation turned to the companies in the monasteries, and their manners so fragrant to You, and of the fruitful deserts of the wilderness, of which we knew nothing. And there was a monastery at Milan full of good brothers, without the walls of the city, under the fostering care of Ambrose, and we were ignorant of it. He went on with his relation, and we listened intently and in silence. He then related to us how on a certain afternoon, at Triers, when the emperor was taken up with seeing the Circensian games, he and three others, his comrades, went out for a walk in the gardens close to the city walls, and there, as they chanced to walk two and two, one strolled away with him, while the other two went by themselves; and these, in their rambling, came upon a certain cottage inhabited by some of Your servants, “poor in spirit,” of whom “is the kingdom of heaven,” where they found a book in which was written the life of Antony. This one of them began to read, marvel at, and be inflamed by it; and in the reading, to meditate on embracing such a life, and giving up his worldly employments to serve You.

And these were of the body called “Agents for Public Affairs.” Then, suddenly being overwhelmed with a holy love and a sober sense of shame, in anger with himself, he cast his eyes upon his friend, exclaiming, “Tell me, I entreat you, what end we are striving for by all these labors of ours. What is our aim? What is our motive in doing service? Can our hopes in court rise higher than to be ministers of the emperor? And in such a position, what is there not brittle, and fraught with danger, and by how many dangers arrive we at greater danger? And when arrive we there? But if I desire to become a friend of God, look, I am even now made it.” Thus spoke he, and in the pangs of the travail of the new life, he turned his eyes again upon the page and continued reading, and was inwardly changed where You saw, and his mind was divested of the world, as soon became evident; for as he read, and the surging of his heart rolled along, he raged awhile, discerned and resolved on a better course, and now, having become Yours, he said to his friend, “Now have I broken loose from those hopes of ours, and am determined to serve God; and this, from this hour, in this place, I enter upon.

If you are reluctant to imitate me, hinder me not.” The other replied that he would cleave to him, to share in so great a reward and so great a service. Thus both of them, being now Yours, were building a tower at the necessary cost,—of forsaking all that they had and following You. Then Pontitianus, and he that had walked with him through other parts of the garden, came in search of them to the same place, and having found them, reminded them to return as the day had declined. But they, making known to him their resolution and purpose, and how such a resolve had sprung up and become confirmed in them, entreated them

not to molest them, if they refused to join themselves to them. But the others, no whit changed from their former selves, did yet (as he said) bewail themselves, and piously congratulated them, recommending themselves to their prayers; and with their hearts inclining towards earthly things, returned to the palace. But the other two, setting their affections upon heavenly things, remained in the cottage.

And both of them had affianced brides, who, when they heard of this, dedicated also their virginity to God.

Such was the story of Pontitianus. But You, O Lord, while he was speaking, did turn me towards myself, taking me from behind my back, where I had placed myself while unwilling to exercise self-scrutiny; and You did set me face to face with myself, that I might see how foul I was, and how crooked and sordid, bespotted and ulcerous. And I beheld and loathed myself; and to where to fly from myself I discovered not. And if I sought to turn my gaze away from myself, he continued his narrative, and You again opposed me to myself, and thrust me before my own eyes, that I might discover my iniquity, and hate it. I had known it, but acted as though I knew it not,—winked at it, and forgot it.

But now, the more ardently I loved those whose healthful affections I heard tell of, that they had given up themselves wholly to You to be cured, the more did I abhor myself when compared with them. For many of my years (perhaps twelve) had passed away since my nineteenth, when, on the reading of Cicero’s Hortensius, I was roused to a desire for wisdom; and still I was delaying to reject mere worldly happiness, and to devote myself to search out that of which not the finding alone, but the bare search, ought to have been preferred before the treasures and kingdoms of this world, though already found, and before the pleasures of the body, though encompassing me at my will. But I, miserable young man, supremely miserable even in the very outset of my youth, had entreated chastity of You, and said, “Grant me chastity and continency, but not yet.” For I was afraid lest You should hear me soon, and soon deliver me from the disease of concupiscence, which I desired to have satisfied rather than extinguished. And I had wandered through perverse ways in a sacrilegious superstition; not indeed assured of it, but preferring that to the others, which I did not seek religiously, but opposed maliciously.

And I had thought that I delayed from day to day to reject worldly hopes and follow You only, because there did not appear anything certain toward which to direct my course. And now had the day arrived in which I was to be laid bare to myself, and my conscience was to chide me. “Where are you, O my tongue? You said, verily, that for an uncertain truth you were not willing to cast off the baggage of vanity. Look, now it is certain, and yet does that burden still oppress you; whereas they who neither have so worn themselves out with searching after it, nor yet have spent ten years and more in thinking on it, have had their

shoulders unburdened, and gotten wings to fly away." Thus was I inwardly consumed and mightily confounded with an horrible shame, while Pontitianus was relating these things. And he, having finished his story, and the business he came for, went his way. And to myself, what said I not within myself? With what scourges of rebuke lashed I not my soul to make it follow me, struggling to go after You! Yet it drew back; it refused, and exercised not itself. All its arguments were exhausted and confuted. There remained a silent trembling; and it feared, as it would death, to be restrained from the flow of that custom by which it was wasting away even to death.

In the midst, then, of this great strife of my inner dwelling, which I had strongly raised up against my soul in the chamber of my heart, troubled both in mind and countenance, I seized upon Alypius, and exclaimed: "What is wrong with us? What is this? What heard you? The unlearned start up and 'take' heaven, and we, with our learning, but wanting heart, see where we wallow in flesh and blood! Because others have preceded us, are we ashamed to follow, and not rather ashamed at not following?" Some such words I gave utterance to, and in my excitement flung myself from him, while he gazed upon me in silent astonishment. For I spoke not in my wonted tone, and my brow, cheeks, eyes, color, tone of voice, all expressed my emotion more than the words. There was a little garden belonging to our lodging, of which we had the use, as of the whole house; for the master, our landlord, did not live there. There had the tempest within my breast hurried me, where no one might impede the fiery struggle in which I was engaged with myself, until it came to the issue that You knew, though I did not.

But I was mad that I might be whole, and dying that I might have life, knowing what evil thing I was, but not knowing what good thing I was shortly to become. Into the garden, then, I retired, Alypius following my steps. For his presence was no bar to my solitude; or how could he desert me so troubled? We sat down at as great a distance from the house as we could. I was disquieted in spirit, being most impatient with myself that I entered not into Your will and covenant, O my God, which all my bones cried out to me to enter, extolling it to the skies. And we enter not in it by ships, or chariots, or feet, no, nor by going so far as I had come from the house to that place where we were sitting. For not to go only, but to enter there, was nothing else but to will to go, but to will it resolutely and thoroughly; not to stagger and sway about this way and that, a changeable and half-wounded will, wrestling, with one part falling as another rose.

Finally, in the very fever of my irresolution, I made many of those motions with my body which men sometimes desire to do, but cannot, if either they have not the limbs, or if their limbs be bound with fetters, weakened by disease, or hindered in any other way. Thus, if I tore my hair, struck my forehead, or if, entwining my fingers, I clasped my knee, this I did because I willed it. But I

might have willed and not done it, if the power of motion in my limbs had not responded. So many things, then, I did, when to have the will was not to have the power, and I did not that which both with an unequalled desire I longed more to do, and which shortly when I should will I should have the power to do; because shortly when I should will, I should will thoroughly. For in such things the power was one with the will, and to will was to do, and yet was it not done; and more readily did the body obey the slightest wish of the soul in the moving its limbs at the order of the mind, than the soul obeyed itself to accomplish in the will alone this its great will.

From where is this monstrous thing? And why is it? Let Your mercy shine on me, that I may inquire, if so be the hiding-places of man's punishment, and the darkest contritions of the sons of Adam, may perhaps answer me. From where is this monstrous thing? and why is it? The mind commands the body, and it obeys forthwith; the mind commands itself, and is resisted. The mind commands the hand to be moved, and such readiness is there that the command is scarce to be distinguished from the obedience. Yet the mind is mind, and the hand is body. The mind commands the mind to will, and yet, though it be itself, it obeys not. From where this monstrous thing? and why is it? I repeat, it commands itself to will, and would not give the command unless it willed; yet is not that done which it commands. But it wills not entirely; therefore it commands not entirely. For so far forth it commands, as it wills; and so far forth is the thing commanded not done, as it wills not.

For the will commands that there be a will;—not another, but itself. But it does not command entirely, therefore that is not which it commands. For were it entire, it would not even command it to be, because it would already be. It is, therefore, no monstrous thing partly to will, partly to be unwilling, but an infirmity of the mind, that it does not wholly rise, sustained by truth, pressed down by custom. And so there are two wills, because one of them is not entire; and the one is supplied with what the other needs.

Let them perish from Your presence, O God, as "vain talkers and deceivers" of the soul do perish, who, observing that there were two wills in deliberating, affirm that there are two kinds of minds in us,—one good, the other evil. They themselves verily are evil when they hold these evil opinions; and they shall become good when they hold the truth, and shall consent to the truth, that Your apostle may say to them, "You were sometimes darkness, but now are you light in the Lord." But, they, desiring to be light, not "in the Lord," but in themselves, conceiving the nature of the soul to be the same as that which God is, are made more gross darkness; for that through a shocking arrogancy they went farther from You, "the true Light, which lights every man that comes into the world." Take heed what you say, and blush for shame; draw near to Him and be "lightened," and your faces shall not be "ashamed." I, when I was deliberating

upon serving the Lord my God now, as I had long purposed,—I it was who willed, I who was unwilling.

It was I, even I myself. I neither willed entirely, nor was entirely unwilling. Therefore was I at war with myself, and destroyed by myself. And this destruction overtook me against my will, and yet showed not the presence of another mind, but the punishment of my own. “Now, then, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me,”—the punishment of a more unconfined sin, in that I was a son of Adam.

For if there be as many contrary natures as there are conflicting wills, there will not now be two natures only, but many. If any one deliberate whether he should go to their conventicle, or to the theater, those men at once cry out, “Look, here are two natures,—one good, drawing this way, another bad, drawing back that way; for from where else is this indecision between conflicting wills?” But I reply that both are bad—that which draws to them, and that which draws back to the theater. But they believe not that will to be other than good which draws to them. Supposing, then, one of us should deliberate, and through the conflict of his two wills should waver whether he should go to the theater or to our church, would not these also waver what to answer? For either they must confess, which they are not willing to do, that the will which leads to our church is good, as well as that of those who have received and are held by the mysteries of theirs, or they must imagine that there are two evil natures and two evil minds in one man, at war one with the other; and that will not be true which they say, that there is one good and another bad; or they must be converted to the truth, and no longer deny that where any one deliberates, there is one soul fluctuating between conflicting wills.

Let them no more say, then, when they perceive two wills to be antagonistic to each other in the same man, that the contest is between two opposing minds, of two opposing substances, from two opposing principles, the one good and the other bad. For You, O true God, do disprove, check, and convince them; like as when both wills are bad, one deliberates whether he should kill a man by poison, or by the sword; whether he should take possession of this or that estate of another’s, when he cannot both; whether he should purchase pleasure by prodigality, or retain his money by covetousness; whether he should go to the circus or the theater, if both are open on the same day; or, thirdly, whether he should rob another man’s house, if he have the opportunity; or, fourthly, whether he should commit adultery, if at the same time he have the means of doing so,—all these things concurring in the same point of time, and all being equally longed for, although impossible to be enacted at one time. For they rend the mind amid four, or even (among the vast variety of things men desire) more antagonistic wills, nor do they yet affirm that there are so many different substances.

Thus also is it in wills which are good. For I ask them, is it a good thing to have delight in reading the apostle, or good to have delight in a sober psalm, or good to discourse on the gospel? To each of these they will answer, “It is good.” What, then, if all equally delight us, and all at the same time? Do not different wills distract the mind, when a man is deliberating which he should rather choose? Yet are they all good, and are at variance until one be fixed upon, to where the whole united will may be borne, which before was divided into many. Thus, also, when above eternity delights us, and the pleasure of temporal good holds us down below, it is the same soul which wills not that or this with an entire will, and is therefore torn asunder with grievous perplexities, while out of truth it prefers that, but out of custom forbears not this.

Reading Notes

1. The account of Antony is received through another person in Augustine’s narrative. Augustine is describing its effect on him, rather than offering an independent history of monastic beginnings.

CHAPTER 3

Conversion and a Changed Life

The familiar scene of the voice urging Augustine to take up and read comes at the end of a long inward struggle. The opening reading preserves the movement toward that scene, including the remembered claims of his former habits, the personification of continence, his tears, and his reading of a passage from Paul's letter to the Romans. Alypius remains present throughout the episode and joins in the change it brings.

The following selections move into Book IX. Augustine describes release from the desires that had held him, his decision to leave his teaching position, and the friendships through which he prepared for baptism. Conversion does not leave him outside ordinary circumstances. His health, work, companions, studies, family, and obligations all remain part of the account.

The final reading takes up the baptism of Augustine, Alypius, and Adeodatus. Augustine's recollection of his son's intelligence gives this episode a personal character that exceeds a summary of religious development. The narrative joins a public act of belonging to the Church with the remembrance of a particular relationship.

Three continuous sequences are presented here. The lengthy meditation on the Psalms in IX.4 is omitted between the second and third readings. Its absence is marked so that the anthology does not imply an uninterrupted transcription. Taken together, the passages show what Augustine understands a changed life to involve: a reorientation of love, followed by decisions and practices through which that reorientation begins to take shape.

Augustine

The Garden and the Reading

Confessions · Book VIII, chapters XI–XII

Thus was I sick and tormented, accusing myself far more severely than was my wont, tossing and turning me in my chain till that was utterly broken, by which I now was but slightly, but still was held. And You, O Lord, pressed upon me in my inward parts by a severe mercy, redoubling the lashes of fear and shame, lest I should again give way, and that same slender remaining tie not being broken off, it should recover strength, and enchain me the faster. For I said mentally, “Look, let it be done now, let it be done now.” And as I spoke, I all but came to a resolve. I all but did it, yet I did it not. Yet fell I not back to my old condition, but took up my position hard by, and drew breath. And I tried again,

and wanted but very little of reaching it, and somewhat less, and then all but touched and grasped it; and yet came not at it, nor touched, nor grasped it, hesitating to die to death, and to live to life; and the worse, whereto I had been habituated, prevailed more with me than the better, which I had not tried.

And the very moment in which I was to become another man, the nearer it approached me, the greater horror did it strike into me; but it did not strike me back, nor turn me aside, but kept me in suspense.

The very toys of toys, and vanities of vanities, my old mistresses, still enthralled me; they shook my fleshly garment, and whispered softly, “Do you part with us? And from that moment shall we no more be with you for ever? And from that moment shall not this or that be lawful for you for ever?” And what did they suggest to me in the words “this or that?” What is it that they suggested, O my God? Let Your mercy avert it from the soul of Your servant. What impurities did they suggest! What shame! And now I far less than half heard them, not openly showing themselves and contradicting me, but muttering, as it were, behind my back, and furtively plucking me as I was departing, to make me look back upon them. Yet they did delay me, so that I hesitated to burst and shake myself free from them, and to leap over to where I was called,—an unruly habit saying to me, “Do you think you can live without them?”

But now it said this very faintly; for on that side towards which I had set my face, and to where I trembled to go, did the chaste dignity of Continence appear to me, cheerful, but not dissolutely gay, honestly alluring me to come and doubt nothing, and extending her holy hands, full of a multiplicity of good examples, to receive and embrace me. There were there so many young men and maidens, a multitude of youth and every age, grave widows and ancient virgins, and Continence herself in all, not barren, but a fruitful mother of children of joys, by You, O Lord, her Husband. And she smiled on me with an encouraging mockery, as if to say, “Can not you do what these youths and maidens can? Or can one or other do it of themselves, and not rather in the Lord their God? The Lord their God gave me to them. Why stand you in your own strength, and so stand not? Cast yourself upon Him; fear not, He will not withdraw that you should fall; cast yourself upon Him without fear, He will receive you, and heal you.” And I blushed beyond measure, for I still heard the muttering of those toys, and hung in suspense.

And she again seemed to say, “Shut up your ears against those unclean members of your upon the earth, that they may be mortified. They tell you of delights, but not as does the law of the Lord your God.” This controversy in my heart was nothing but self against self. But Alypius, sitting close by my side, awaited in silence the result of my unwonted emotion.

But when a profound reflection had, from the secret depths of my soul, drawn together and heaped up all my misery before the sight of my heart, there arose a

mighty storm, accompanied by as mighty a shower of tears. Which, that I might pour forth fully, with its natural expressions, I stole away from Alypius; for it suggested itself to me that solitude was fitter for the business of weeping. So I retired to such a distance that even his presence could not be oppressive to me. Thus was it with me at that time, and he perceived it; for something, I believe, I had spoken, in which the sound of my voice appeared choked with weeping, and in that state had I risen up. He then remained where we had been sitting, most completely astonished. I flung myself down, how, I know not, under a certain fig-tree, giving free course to my tears, and the streams of my eyes gushed out, an acceptable sacrifice to You. And, not indeed in these words, yet to this effect, spoke I much to You,—"But You, O Lord, how long?" "How long, Lord? Will You be angry for ever? Oh, remember not against us former iniquities;" for I felt that I was enthralled by them. I sent up these sorrowful cries,—"How long, how long? Tomorrow, and tomorrow? Why not now? Why is there not this hour an end to my uncleanness?"

I was saying these things and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when, look, I heard the voice as of a boy or girl, I know not which, coming from a neighboring house, chanting, and often repeating, "Take up and read; take up and read." Immediately my countenance was changed, and I began most earnestly to consider whether it was usual for children in any kind of game to sing such words; nor could I remember ever to have heard the like. So, restraining the torrent of my tears, I rose up, interpreting it no other way than as a command to me from Heaven to open the book, and to read the first

Chapter I should light upon. For I had heard of Antony, that, accidentally coming in while the gospel was being read, he received the admonition as if what was read were addressed to him, "Go and sell that you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me." And by such oracle was he forthwith converted to You. So quickly I returned to the place where Alypius was sitting; for there had I put down the volume of the apostles, when I rose from there. I grasped, opened, and in silence read that paragraph on which my eyes first fell,—"Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put you on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts of it." No further would I read, nor did I need; for instantly, as the sentence ended,—by a light, as it were, of security infused into my heart,—all the gloom of doubt vanished away.

Closing the book, then, and putting either my finger between, or some other mark, I now with a tranquil countenance made it known to Alypius. And he thus disclosed to me what was worked in him, which I knew not. He asked to look at what I had read. I showed him; and he looked even further than I had read, and I knew not what followed. This it was, verily, "Him that is weak in the faith,

receive you;” which he applied to himself, and discovered to me. By this admonition was he strengthened; and by a good resolution and purpose, very much in accord with his character (in which, for the better, he was always far different from me), without any restless delay he joined me. From there we go in to my mother. We make it known to her,—she rejoices. We relate how it came to pass,—she leaps for joy, and triumphs, and blesses You, who are “able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think; for she perceived You to have given her more for me than she used to ask by her pitiful and most doleful groanings.

For You did so convert me to Yourself, that I sought neither a wife, nor any other of this world’s hopes,—standing in that rule of faith in which You, so many years before, had showed me to her in a vision. And you did turn her grief into a gladness, much more plentiful than she had desired, and much dearer and chaster than she used to crave, by having grandchildren of my body.

Release, Withdrawal, and Friendship

Confessions · Book IX, chapters I–III

“O Lord, truly I am Your servant; I am Your servant, and the son of Your handmaid: You have loosed my bonds. I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving.” Let my heart and my tongue praise You, and let all my bones say, “Lord, who is like to You?” Let them so say, and answer You me, and “say to my soul, I am Your salvation.” Who am I, and what is my nature? How evil have not my deeds been; or if not my deeds, my words; or if not my words, my will? But You, O Lord, are good and merciful, and Your right hand had respect to the profoundness of my death, and removed from the bottom of my heart that abyss of corruption. And this was the result, that I willed not to do what I willed, and willed to do what you willed. But where, during all those years, and out of what deep and secret retreat was my free will summoned forth in a moment, by which I gave my neck to Your “easy yoke,” and my shoulders to Your “light burden,” O Christ Jesus, “my strength and my Redeemer”?

How sweet did it suddenly become to me to be without the delights of trifles! And what at one time I feared to lose, it was now a joy to me to put away. For You did cast them away from me, You true and highest sweetness. You did cast them away, and instead of them did enter in Yourself,—sweeter than all pleasure, though not to flesh and blood; brighter than all light, but more veiled than all mysteries; more exalted than all honor, but not to the exalted in their own conceits. Now was my soul free from the gnawing cares of seeking and getting, and of wallowing and exciting the itch of lust. And I babbled to You my brightness, my riches, and my health, the Lord my God.

And it seemed good to me, as before You, not tumultuously to snatch away, but gently to withdraw the service of my tongue from the talker’s trade; that the

young, who thought not on Your law, nor on Your peace, but on mendacious follies and forensic strifes, might no longer purchase at my mouth equipments for their vehemence. And opportunely there wanted but a few days to the Vacation of the Vintage; and I determined to endure them, in order to leave in the usual way, and, being redeemed by You, no more to return for sale. Our intention then was known to You; but to men—excepting our own friends—was it not known. For we had determined among ourselves not to let it get abroad to any; although You had given to us, ascending from the valley of tears, and singing the song of degrees, “sharp arrows,” and destroying coals, against the “deceitful tongue,” which in giving counsel opposes, and in showing love consumes, as it is wont to do with its food.

You had penetrated our hearts with Your love, and we carried Your words fixed, as it were, in our bowels; and the examples of Your servant, whom of black You had made bright, and of dead, alive, crowded in the bosom of our thoughts, burned and consumed our heavy torpor, that we might not topple into the abyss; and they enkindled us exceedingly, that every breath of the deceitful tongue of the gainsayer might inflame us the more, not extinguish us. Nevertheless, because for Your name’s sake which You have sanctified throughout the earth, this, our vow and purpose, might also find commenders, it looked like a vaunting of oneself not to wait for the vacation, now so near, but to leave beforehand a public profession, and one, too, under general observation; so that all who looked on this act of mine, and saw how near was the vintage-time I desired to anticipate, would talk of me a great deal as if I were trying to appear to be a great person. And what purpose would it serve that people should consider and dispute about my intention, and that our good should be evil spoken of?

Furthermore, this very summer, from too great literary labor, my lungs began to be weak, and with difficulty to draw deep breaths; showing by the pains in my chest that they were affected, and refusing too loud or prolonged speaking. This had at first been a trial to me, for it compelled me almost of necessity to lay down that burden of teaching; or, if I could be cured and become strong again, at least to leave it off for a while. But when the full desire for leisure, that I might see that You are the Lord, arose, and was confirmed in me, my God, You know I even began to rejoice that I had this excuse ready,—and that not a feigned one,—which might somewhat temper the offense taken by those who for their sons’ good wished me never to have the freedom of sons. Full, therefore, with such joy, I bore it till that period of time had passed,—perhaps it was some twenty days,—yet they were bravely borne; for the cupidity which was wont to sustain part of this weighty business had departed, and I had remained overwhelmed had not its place been supplied by patience.

Some of Your servants, my brothers, may perhaps say that I sinned in this, in that having once fully, and from my heart, entered on Your warfare, I permitted

myself to sit a single hour in the seat of falsehood. I will not contend. But have not You, O most merciful Lord, pardoned and remitted this sin also, with my others, so horrible and deadly, in the holy water?

Verecundus was wasted with anxiety at that our happiness, since he, being most firmly held by his bonds, saw that he would lose our fellowship. For he was not yet a Christian, though his wife was one of the faithful; and yet hereby, being more firmly enchained than by anything else, was he held back from that journey which we had commenced. Nor, he declared, did he wish to be a Christian on any other terms than those that were impossible. However, he invited us most courteously to make use of his country house so long as we should stay there. You, O Lord, will “recompense” him for this “at the resurrection of the just,” seeing that You have already given him “the lot of the righteous.” For although, when we were absent at Rome, he, being overtaken with bodily sickness, and in it being made a Christian, and one of the faithful, departed this life, yet had You mercy on him, and not on him only, but on us also; lest, thinking on the exceeding kindness of our friend to us, and unable to count him in Your flock, we should be tortured with intolerable grief.

Thanks be to You, our God, we are Yours. Your exhortations, consolations, and faithful promises assure us that You now repay Verecundus for that country house at Cassiacum, where from the fever of the world we found rest in You, with the perpetual freshness of Your Paradise, in that You have forgiven him his earthly sins, in that mountain flowing with milk, that fruitful mountain,—Your own.

He then was at that time full of grief; but Nebridius was joyous. Although he also, not being yet a Christian, had fallen into the pit of that most pernicious error of believing Your Son to be a phantasm, yet, coming out from there, he held the same belief that we did; not as yet initiated in any of the sacraments of Your Church, but a most earnest inquirer after truth. Whom, not long after our conversion and regeneration by Your baptism, he being also a faithful member of the Catholic Church, and serving You in perfect chastity and continency among his own people in Africa, when his whole household had been brought to Christianity through him, did You release from the flesh; and now he lives in Abraham’s bosom. Whatever that may be which is signified by that bosom, there lives my Nebridius, my sweet friend, Your son, O Lord, adopted of a freedman; there he lives. For what other place could there be for such a soul? There lives he, concerning which he used to ask me much,—me, an inexperienced, feeble one.

Now he puts not his ear to my mouth, but his spiritual mouth to Your fountain, and drinks as much as he is able, wisdom according to his desire,—happy without end. Nor do I believe that he is so inebriated with it as to forget me, seeing You, O Lord, whom he drinks, are mindful of us. Thus, then, were we

comforting the sorrowing Verecundus (our friendship being untouched) concerning our conversion, and exhorting him to a faith according to his condition, I mean, his married state. And tarrying for Nebridius to follow us, which being so near, he was just about to do, when, look, those days passed over at last; for long and many they seemed, on account of my love of easeful liberty, that I might sing to You from my very marrow. My heart said to You,—I have sought Your face; “Your face, Lord, will I seek.”

Preparation and Baptism

Confessions · Book IX, chapters V–VI

The vintage vacation being ended, I gave the citizens of Milan notice that they might provide their scholars with another seller of words; because both of my election to serve You, and my inability, by reason of the difficulty of breathing and the pain in my chest, to continue the Professorship. And by letters I notified to Your bishop, the holy man Ambrose, my former errors and present resolutions, with a view to his advising me which of Your books it was best for me to read, so that I might be readier and fitter for the reception of such great grace. He recommended Isaiah the Prophet; I believe, because he foreshows more clearly than others the gospel, and the calling of the Gentiles. But I, not understanding the first portion of the book, and imagining the whole to be like it, laid it aside, intending to take it up hereafter, when better practiced in our Lord’s words.

From there, when the time had arrived at which I was to give in my name, having left the country, we returned to Milan. Alypius also was pleased to be born again with me in You, being now clothed with the humility appropriate to Your sacraments, and being so brave a tamer of the body, as with unusual fortitude to tread the frozen soil of Italy with his naked feet. We took into our company the boy Adeodatus, born of me carnally, of my sin. Well had You made him. He was barely fifteen years, yet in wit excelled many grave and learned men. I confess to You Your gifts, O Lord my God, Creator of all, and of exceeding power to reform our deformities; for of me was there nothing in that boy but the sin. For that we fostered him in Your discipline, You inspired us, none other,—Your gifts I confess to You. There is a book of ours, which is entitled The Master. It is a dialogue between him and me. You know that all things there put into the mouth of the person in argument with me were his thoughts in his sixteenth year.

Many others more wonderful did I find in him. That talent was a source of awe to me. And who but You could be the worker of such marvels? Quickly did You remove his life from the earth; and now I recall him to mind with a sense of security, in that I fear nothing for his childhood or youth, or for his whole self. We took him coeval with us in Your grace, to be educated in Your discipline; and

we were baptized, and solicitude about our past life left us. Nor was I satiated in those days with the wondrous sweetness of considering the depth of Your counsels concerning the salvation of the human race. How greatly did I weep in Your hymns and canticles, deeply moved by the voices of Your sweet-speaking Church! The voices flowed into my ears, and the truth was poured forth into my heart, from where the agitation of my piety overflowed, and my tears ran over, and blessed was I in it.

Reading Notes

1. Book IX, chapter IV, is omitted between the second and third selections.

2. Scriptural wording within Augustine’s narrative follows the historical English source, with the same language modernization applied to the surrounding prose.

PART II

The Eternal Word

The readings in this part follow Augustine into the opening of John's Gospel and then into the relation between inward thought and the divine Word. They begin with sermons addressed to a gathered Christian congregation. Their images come from mountains, ships, lamps, physicians, and ordinary speech. These familiar things become occasions for an ascent of understanding: the reader is asked to move from what is made toward the Word through whom it was made.

The first two chapters retain the rhythm of that spoken instruction. Augustine repeatedly returns to humility, because he regards the condition of the hearer as inseparable from the possibility of understanding. John the Baptist's testimony and the incarnation belong within the inquiry into the Word's divinity. For Augustine, the eternal Word is the one who enters human life and heals its damaged capacities.

The final chapter changes literary setting. In On the Trinity, Augustine subjects the analogy between a human word and the divine Word to a sustained examination. A thought can be present without being spoken; its sound can disappear while what is known remains. Yet knowledge can also be incomplete, forgotten, mistaken, or dependent on testimony. Augustine uses these limitations to clarify the distance between the human image and the divine reality. His analogy proceeds through both likeness and unlikeness. That movement is central to the selected argument.

CHAPTER 4

In the Beginning

Augustine begins his first tractate on John by asking how words about God can be understood by human hearers. His concern extends to the preacher himself. Inspiration enables a person to speak, yet the speaker remains human and speaks according to a human capacity. The opening therefore combines confidence in the Gospel with a recognition of the difficulty of explaining it.

John becomes a mountain whose height represents contemplation. Augustine asks his hearers to rise toward the evangelist's meaning while directing their trust toward the source of the mountain's illumination. The metaphor gives his exposition a movement: created things are recognized, their dependence is considered, and the mind is urged toward that through which they have their existence. The eternal Word is approached through an account of creation and through the hearer's own experience of speaking.

The complete tractate is retained here. Its changes of scale and repeated appeals belong to the argument. The examples concerning ordinary words are especially important. A sound passes through the air, but what is understood through it can remain in the mind. Augustine then asks the reader to consider the Word through whom all things were made. The comparison prepares a distinction between a passing act of speech and the enduring reality signified by the Gospel. The tractate's concluding reflections on light and darkness carry the inquiry into the capacity of human beings to receive what is presented to them.

Augustine

Tractate 1

Tractates on the Gospel of John · Tractate 1, complete

When I give heed to what we have just read from the apostolic lesson, that “the natural man does not perceive the things which are of the Spirit of God,” and consider that in the present assembly, my beloved, there must of necessity be among you many natural men, who know only according to the flesh, and cannot yet raise themselves to spiritual understanding, I am in great difficulty how, as the Lord shall grant, I may be able to express, or in my small measure to explain, what has been read from the Gospel, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God;” for this the natural man does not perceive. What then, brothers? Shall we be silent for this cause? Why then is it read, if we are to be silent regarding it? Or why is it heard, if it be not explained? And why is it explained, if it be not understood? And so, on the other

hand, since I do not doubt that there are among your number some who can not only receive it when explained, but even understand it before it is explained, I shall not defraud those who are able to receive it, from fear of my words being wasted on the ears of those who are not able to receive it.

Finally, there will be present with us the compassion of God, so that perhaps there may be enough for all, and each receive what he is able, while he who speaks says what he is able. For to speak of the matter as it is, who is able? I venture to say, my brothers, perhaps not John himself spoke of the matter as it is, but even he only as he was able; for it was man that spoke of God, inspired indeed by God, but still man. Because he was inspired he said something; if he had not been inspired, he would have said nothing; but because a man inspired, he spoke not the whole, but what a man could he spoke.

For this John, dearly beloved brothers, was one of those mountains concerning which it is written: “Let the mountains receive peace for your people, and the hills righteousness.” The mountains are lofty souls, the hills little souls. But for this reason do the mountains receive peace, that the hills may be able to receive righteousness. What is the righteousness which the hills receive? Faith, for “the just does live by faith.” The smaller souls, however, would not receive faith unless the greater souls, which are called mountains, were illuminated by Wisdom herself, that they may be able to transmit to the little ones what the little ones can receive; and the hills live by faith, because the mountains receive peace. By the mountains themselves it was said to the Church, “Peace be with you;” and the mountains themselves in proclaiming peace to the Church did not divide themselves against Him from whom they received peace, that truly, not feignedly, they might proclaim peace.

For there are other mountains which cause shipwreck, on which, if any one drive his ship, she is dashed to pieces. For it is easy, when land is seen by men in peril, to make a venture as it were to reach it; but sometimes land is seen on a mountain, and rocks lie hid under the mountain; and when any one makes for the mountain, he falls on the rocks, and finds there not rest, but wrecking. So there have been certain mountains, and great have they appeared among men, and they have created heresies and schisms, and have divided the Church of God; but those who divided the Church of God were not those mountains concerning which it is said, “Let the mountains receive peace for your people.” For in what manner have they received peace who have severed unity?

But those who received peace to proclaim it to the people have made Wisdom herself an object of contemplation, so far as human hearts could lay hold on that which “eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has ascended into the heart of man.” If it has not ascended into the heart of man, how has it ascended into the heart of John? Was not John a man? Or perhaps neither into John’s heart did it ascend, but John’s heart ascended into it? For that which ascends into the heart

of man is from beneath, to man; but that to which the heart of man ascends is above, from man. Even so brothers, can it be said that, if it ascended into the heart of John (if in any way it can be said), it ascended into his heart in so far as he was not man. What means “was not man”? In so far as he had begun to be an angel. For all saints are angels, since they are messengers of God. Therefore to carnal and natural men, who are not able to perceive the things that are of God, what says the apostle?

“For whereas you say, I am of Paul, I of Apollos, are you not men?” What did he wish to make them whom he upbraided because they were men? Do you wish to know what he wished to make them? Hear in the Psalms: “I have said, you are gods; and all of you are children of the Most High.” To this, then, God calls us, that we be not men. But then will it be for the better that we be not men, if first we recognize the fact that we are men, that is, to the end that we may rise to that height from humility; lest, when we think that we are something when we are nothing, we not only do not receive what we are not, but even lose what we are.

Accordingly, brothers, of these mountains was John also, who said, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” This mountain had received peace; he was contemplating the divinity of the Word. Of what sort was this mountain? How lofty? He had risen above all peaks of the earth, he had risen above all plains of the sky, he had risen above all heights of the stars, he had risen above all choirs and legions of the angels. For unless he rose above all those things which were created, he would not arrive at Him by whom all things were made. You cannot imagine what he rose above, unless you see at what he arrived. Do you inquire concerning heaven and earth? They were made. Do you inquire concerning the things that are in heaven and earth? Surely much more were they made. Do you inquire concerning spiritual beings, concerning angels, archangels, thrones, dominions, powers, principalities? These also were made. For when the Psalm enumerated all these things, it finished thus: “He spoke, and they were made; He commanded, and they were created.” If “He spoke and they were made,” it was by the Word that they were made; but if it was by the Word they were made, the heart of John could not reach to that which he says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” unless he had risen above all things that were made by the Word.

What a mountain this! How holy! How high among those mountains that received peace for the people of God, that the hills might receive righteousness!

Consider, then, brothers, if perhaps John is not one of those mountains concerning whom we sang a little while ago, “I have lifted up my eyes to the mountains, from where shall come my help.” Therefore, my brothers, if you would understand, lift up your eyes to this mountain, that is, raise yourselves up

to the evangelist, rise to his meaning. But, because though these mountains receive peace he cannot be in peace who places his hope in man, do not so raise your eyes to the mountain as to think that your hope should be placed in man; and so say, “I have lifted up my eyes to the mountains, from where shall come my help,” that you immediately add, “My help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” Therefore let us lift our eyes to the mountains, from where shall come our help; and yet it is not in the mountains themselves that our hope should be placed, for the mountains receive what they may minister to us; therefore, from where the mountains also receive there should our hope be placed.

When we lift our eyes to the Scriptures, since it was through men the Scriptures were ministered, we are lifting our eyes to the mountains, from where shall come our help; but still, since they were men who wrote the Scriptures, they did not shine of themselves, but “He was the true light, who lights every man that comes into the world.” A mountain also was that John the Baptist, who said, “I am not the Christ,” lest any one, placing his hope in the mountain, should fall from Him who illuminates the mountain. He also confessed, saying, “Since of His fullness have all we received.” So you ought to say, “I have lifted up my eyes to the mountains, from where shall come my help,” so as not to ascribe to the mountains the help that comes to you; but continue and say, “My help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”

Therefore, brothers, may this be the result of my admonition, that you understand that in raising your hearts to the Scriptures (when the gospel was sounding forth, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” and the rest that was read), you were lifting your eyes to the mountains. For unless the mountains said these things, you would not find out how to think of them at all. Therefore from the mountains came your help, that you even heard of these things; but you cannot yet understand what you have heard. Call for help from the Lord, who made heaven and earth; for the mountains were enabled only so to speak as not of themselves to illuminate, because they themselves are also illuminated by hearing. From there John, who said these things, received them—he who lay on the Lord’s breast, and from the Lord’s breast drank in what he might give us to drink. But he gave us words to drink. You ought then to receive understanding from the source from which he drank who gave you to drink; so that you may lift up your eyes to the mountains from where shall come your aid, so that from there you may receive, as it were, the cup, that is, the word, given you to drink; and yet, since your help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth, you may fill your breast from the source from which he filled his; from where you said, “My help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth:” let him, then, fill who can.

Brothers, this is what I have said: Let each one lift up his heart in the manner that seems fitting, and receive what is spoken. But perhaps you will say that I am more present to you than God. Far be such a thought from you! He is much more present to you; for I appear to your eyes, He presides over your consciences. Give me then your ears, Him your hearts, that you may fill both. Look, your eyes, and those your bodily senses, you lift up to us; and yet not to us, for we are not of those mountains, but to the gospel itself, to the evangelist himself: your hearts, however, to the Lord to be filled. Moreover, let each one so lift up as to see what he lifts up, and to where. What do I mean by saying, “what he lifts up, and to where?” Let him see to it what sort of a heart he lifts up, because it is to the Lord he lifts it up, lest, encumbered by a load of fleshly pleasure, it fall ere ever it is raised.

But does each one see that he bears a burden of flesh? Let him strive by continence to purify that which he may lift up to God. For “Blessed are the pure in heart, because they shall see God.”

But let us see what advantage it is that these words have sounded, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” We also uttered words when we spoke. Was it such a word that was with God? Did not those words which we uttered sound and pass away? Did God’s Word, then, sound and come to an end? If so, how were all things made by it, and without it was nothing made? how is that which it created ruled by it, if it sounded and passed away? What sort of a word, then, is that which is both uttered and passes not away? Give ear, my beloved, it is a great matter. By everyday talk, words here become despicable to us, because through their sounding and passing away they are despised, and seem nothing but words. But there is a word in the man himself which remains within; for the sound proceeds from the mouth. There is a word which is spoken in a truly spiritual manner, that which you understand from the sound, not the sound itself.

Mark, I speak a word when I say “God.” How short the word which I have spoken—four letters and two syllables! Is this all that God is, four letters and two syllables? Or is that which is signified as costly as the word is paltry? What took place in your heart when you heard “God”? What took place in my heart when I said “God”? A certain great and perfect substance was in our thoughts, transcending every changeable creature of flesh or of soul. And if I say to you, “Is God changeable or unchangeable?” you will answer immediately, “Far be it from me either to believe or imagine that God is changeable: God is unchangeable.” Your soul, though small, though perhaps still carnal, could not answer me otherwise than that God is unchangeable: but every creature is changeable; how then were you able to enter, by a glance of your spirit, into that which is above the creature, so as confidently to answer me, “God is unchangeable”? What, then, is that in your heart, when you think of a certain

substance, living, eternal, all-powerful, infinite, everywhere present, everywhere whole, nowhere shut in?

When you think of these qualities, this is the word concerning God in your heart. But is this that sound which consists of four letters and two syllables? Therefore, whatever things are spoken and pass away are sounds, are letters, are syllables. His word which sounds passes away; but that which the sound signified, and was in the speaker as he thought of it, and in the hearer as he understood it, that remains while the sounds pass away.

Turn your attention to that word. You can have a word in your heart, as it were a design born in your mind, so that your mind brings forth the design; and the design is, so to speak, the offspring of your mind, the child of your heart. For first your heart brings forth a design to construct some fabric, to set up something great on the earth; already the design is conceived, and the work is not yet finished: you see what you will make; but another does not admire, until you have made and constructed the pile, and brought that fabric into shape and to completion; then men regard the admirable fabric, and admire the design of the architect; they are astonished at what they see, and are pleased with what they do not see: who is there who can see a design? If, then, on account of some great building a human design receives praise, do you wish to see what a design of God is the Lord Jesus Christ, that is, the Word of God? Mark this fabric of the world.

View what was made by the Word, and then you will understand what is the nature of the world. Mark these two bodies of the world, the heavens and the earth. Who will unfold in words the beauty of the heavens? Who will unfold in words the fruitfulness of the earth? Who will worthily extol the changes of the seasons? Who will worthily extol the power of seeds? You see what things I do not mention, lest in giving a long list I should perhaps tell of less than you can call up to your own minds. From this fabric, then, judge the nature of the Word by which it was made: and not it alone; for all these things are seen, because they have to do with the bodily sense. By that Word angels also were made; by that Word archangels were made, powers, thrones, dominions, principalities; by that Word were made all things. Hence, judge what a Word this is.

Perhaps some one now answers me, “Who so conceives this Word?” Do not then imagine, as it were, some paltry thing when you hear “the Word,” nor suppose it to be words such as you hear them every day—“he spoke such words,” “such words he uttered,” “such words you tell me;” for by constant repetition the term word has become, so to speak, worthless. And when you hear, “In the beginning was the Word,” lest you should imagine something worthless, such as you have been accustomed to think of when you were wont to listen to human words, hearken to what you must think of: “The Word was God.”

Now some unbelieving Arian may come forth and say that “the Word of God was made.” How can it be that the Word of God was made, when God by the Word made all things? If the Word of God was itself also made, by what other Word was it made? But if you say that there is a Word of the Word, I say, that by which it was made is itself the only Son of God. But if you do not say there is a Word of the Word, allow that that was not made by which all things were made. For that by which all things were made could not be made by itself. Believe the evangelist then. For he might have said, “In the beginning God made the Word:” even as Moses said, “In the beginning God made the heavens and the earth;” and enumerates all things thus: “God said, Let it be made, and it was made.” If “said,” who said? God. And what was made? Some creature. Between the speaking of God and the making of the creature, what was there by which it was made but the Word? For God said, “Let it be made, and it was made.” This Word is unchangeable; although changeable things are made by it, the Word itself is unchangeable.

Do not then believe that that was made by which were made all things, lest you be not new-made by the Word, which makes all things new. For already have you been made by the Word, but it behoves you to be new-made by the Word. If, however, your belief about the Word be wrong, you will not be able to be new-made by the Word. And although creation by the Word has happened to you, so that you have been made by Him, you are unmade by yourself: if by yourself you are unmade, let Him who made you make you new: if by yourself you have been made worse, let Him who created you re-create you. But how can He re-create you by the Word, if you hold a wrong opinion about the Word? The evangelist says, “In the beginning was the Word;” and you say, “In the beginning the Word was made.” He says, “All things were made by Him;” and you say that the Word Himself was made. The evangelist might have said, “In the beginning the Word was made:” but what does he say?

“In the beginning was the Word.” If He was, He was not made; that all things might be made by it, and without Him nothing be made. If, then, “in the beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God;” if you cannot imagine what it is, wait till you are grown. That is strong meat: receive you milk that you may be nourished, and be able to receive strong meat.

Give good heed to what follows, brothers, “All things were made by Him, and without Him was nothing made,” so as not to imagine that “nothing” is something. For many, wrongly understanding “without Him was nothing made,” are wont to fancy that “nothing” is something. Sin, indeed, was not made by Him; and it is plain that sin is nothing, and men become nothing when they sin. An idol also was not made by the Word;—it has indeed a sort of human form, but man himself was made by the Word;—for the form of man in an idol was not made by the Word, and it is written, “We know that an idol is nothing.”

Therefore these things were not made by the Word; but whatever was made in the natural manner, whatever belongs to the creature, everything that is fixed in the sky, that shines from above, that flies under the heavens, and that moves in universal nature, every creature whatever: I will speak more plainly, brothers, that you may understand me; I will say, from an angel even to a worm.

What more excellent than an angel among created things? what lower than a worm? He who made the angel made the worm also; but the angel is fit for heaven, the worm for earth. He who created also arranged. If He had placed the worm in heaven, you might have found fault; if He had willed that angels should spring from decaying flesh, you might have found fault: and yet God almost does this, and He is not to be found fault with. For all men born of flesh, what are they but worms? and of these worms God makes angels. For if the Lord Himself says, “But I am a worm and no man,” who will hesitate to say what is written also in Job, “How much more is man rottenness, and the son of man a worm?” First he said, “Man is rottenness;” and afterwards, “The son of man a worm:” because a worm springs from rottenness, therefore “man is rottenness,” and “the son of man a worm.” Look what for your sake He was willing to become, who “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God!” Why did He for your sake become this?

That you might suck, who were not able to chew. Wholly in this sense, then, brothers, understand “All things were made by Him, and without Him was nothing made.” For every creature, great and small, was made by Him: by Him were made things above and things beneath; spiritual and corporeal, by Him were they made. For no form, no structure, no agreement of parts, no substance whatever that can have weight, number, measure, exists but by that Word, and by that Creator Word, to whom it is said, “You have ordered all things in measure, and in number, and in weight.”

Therefore, let no one deceive you, when perhaps you suffer annoyance from flies. For some have been mocked by the devil, and taken with flies. As fowlers are accustomed to put flies in their traps to deceive hungry birds, so these have been deceived with flies by the devil. Some one or other was suffering annoyance from flies; a Manichaean found him in his trouble, and when he said that he could not bear flies, and hated them exceedingly, immediately the Manichaean said, “Who made them?” And since he was suffering from annoyance, and hated them, he dared not say, “God made them,” though he was a Catholic. The other immediately added, “If God did not make them, who made them?” “Truly,” replied the Catholic, “I believe the devil made them.” And the other immediately said, “If the devil made the fly, as I see you allow, because you understand the matter well, who made the bee, which is a little larger than the fly?” The Catholic dared not say that God made the bee and not the fly, for the case was much the same.

From the bee he led him to the locust; from the locust to the lizard; from the lizard to the bird; from the bird to the sheep; from the sheep to the cow; from that to the elephant, and at last to man; and persuaded a man that man was not made by God. Thus the miserable man, being troubled with the flies, became himself a fly, and the property of the devil. In fact, Beelzebub, they say, means "Prince of flies;" and of these it is written, "Dying flies deprive the ointment of its sweetness."

What then, brothers? why have I said these things? Shut the ears of your hearts against the wiles of the enemy. Understand that God made all things, and arranged them in their orders. Why, then, do we suffer many evils from a creature that God made? Because we have offended God? Do angels suffer these things? Perhaps we, too, in that life of theirs, would have no such thing to fear. For your punishment, accuse your sin, not the Judge. For, on account of our pride, God appointed that tiny and contemptible creature to torment us; so that, since man has become proud and has boasted himself against God, and, though mortal, has oppressed mortals, and, though man, has not acknowledged his fellowman,—since he has lifted himself up, he may be brought low by gnats. Why are you inflated with human pride? Some one has censured you, and you are swollen with rage. Drive off the gnats, that you may sleep: understand who you are. For, that you may know, brothers, it was for the taming of our pride these things were created to be troublesome to us, God could have humbled Pharaoh's proud people by bears, by lions, by serpents; He sent flies and frogs upon them, that their pride might be subdued by the mean creatures.

"All things," then, brothers, "all things were made by Him, and without Him was nothing made." But how were all things made by Him? "That, which was made, in Him is life." It can also be read thus: "That, which was made in Him, is life;" and if we so read it, everything is life. For what is there that was not made in Him? For He is the Wisdom of God, and it is said in the Psalm, "In Wisdom have You made all things." If, then, Christ is the Wisdom of God, and the Psalm says, "In Wisdom have You made all things:" as all things were made by Him, so all things were made in Him. If, then, all things were made in Him, dearly beloved brothers, and that, which was made in Him, is life, both the earth is life and wood is life. We do indeed say wood is life, but in the sense of the wood of the cross, from where we have received life. A stone, then, is life. It is not seemly so to understand the passage, as the same most vile sect of the Manichaeans creep stealthily on us again, and say that a stone has life, that a wall has a soul, and a cord has a soul, and wool, and clothing.

For so they are accustomed to talk in their raving; and when they have been driven back and refuted, they in some sort bring forward Scripture, saying, "Why is it said, 'That, which was made in Him, is life'?" For if all things were made in Him, all things are life. Be not carried away by them; read thus "That which was

made;" here make a short pause, and then go on, "in Him is life." What is the meaning of this? The earth was made, but the very earth that was made is not life; but there exists spiritually in the Wisdom itself a certain reason by which the earth was made: this is life.

As far as I can, I shall explain my meaning to you, beloved. A carpenter makes a box. First he has the box in design; for if he had it not in design, how could he produce it by workmanship? But the box in theory is not the very box as it appears to the eyes. It exists invisibly in design, it will be visible in the work. Look, it is made in the work; has it ceased to exist in design? The one is made in the work, and the other remains which exists in design; for that box may rot, and another be fashioned according to that which exists in design. Give heed, then, to the box as it is in design, and the box as it is in fact. The actual box is not life, the box in design is life; because the soul of the artificer, where all these things are before they are brought forth, is living. So, dearly beloved brothers, because the Wisdom of God, by which all things have been made, contains everything according to design before it is made, therefore those things which are made through this design itself are not forthwith life, but whatever has been made is life in Him.

You see the earth, there is an earth in design; you see the sky, there is a sky in design; you see the sun and the moon, these also exist in design: but externally they are bodies, in design they are life. Understand, if in any way you are able, for a great matter has been spoken. If I am not great by whom it is spoken, or through whom it is spoken, still it is from a great authority. For these things are not spoken by me who am small; He is not small to whom I refer in saying these things. Let each one take in what he can, and to what extent he can; and he who is not able to take in any of it, let him nourish his heart, that he may become able. How is he to nourish it? Let him nourish it with milk, that he may come to strong meat. Let him not leave Christ born through the flesh till he arrive at Christ born of the Father alone, the God-Word with God, through whom all things were made; for that is life, which in Him is the light of men.

For this follows: "and the life was the light of men;" and from this very life are men illuminated. Cattle are not illuminated, because cattle have not rational minds capable of seeing wisdom. But man was made in the image of God, and has a rational mind, by which he can perceive wisdom. That life, then, by which all things were made, is itself the light; yet not the light of every animal, but of men. Therefore a little after he says, "That was the true light, which lights every man that comes into the world." By that light John the Baptist was illuminated; by the same light also was John the Evangelist himself illuminated. He was filled with that light who said, "I am not the Christ; but He comes after me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose." By that light he had been illuminated

who said, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Therefore that life is the light of men.

But perhaps the slow hearts of some of you cannot yet receive that light, because they are burdened by their sins, so that they cannot see. Let them not on that account think that the light is in any way absent, because they are not able to see it; for they themselves are darkness on account of their sins. “And the light shines in darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.” Accordingly, brothers, as in the case of a blind man placed in the sun, the sun is present to him, but he is absent from the sun. So every foolish man, every unjust man, every irreligious man, is blind in heart. Wisdom is present; but it is present to a blind man, and is absent from his eyes; not because it is absent from him, but because he is absent from it. What then is he to do? Let him become pure, that he may be able to see God. Just as if a man could not see because his eyes were dirty and sore with dust, rheum, or smoke, the physician would say to him: “Cleanse from your eye whatever bad thing is in it, so that you may be able to see the light of your eyes.” Dust, rheum, and smoke are sins and iniquities: remove then all these things, and you will see the wisdom that is present; for God is that wisdom, and it has been said, “Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God.”

Reading Notes

1. The complete first tractate comments on John 1:1–5. The wording of biblical quotations is modernized from the historical translation used here.

2. In the mountain image, Augustine treats John as an illuminated human witness. His explanation directs trust toward God as the source of the witness's illumination.

CHAPTER 5

The Word With God

John's Gospel places testimony beside its account of the eternal Word. The Baptist appears as a witness to a light that precedes him. Augustine develops that relation through images of dependence: a lamp receives illumination, a sick person receives healing, and a person changed by grace receives a life that cannot be credited simply to his own achievement. The humility of the witness becomes a way of thinking about the hearer's relation to truth.

The complete second tractate follows the Gospel from the Baptist's mission toward the Word's becoming flesh. Augustine joins contemplation of the Word with an account of the means by which human beings approach him. The incarnation is therefore central to the movement of the sermon. The reader's desire for a higher understanding must travel through the human condition in which the Word has appeared.

Two connected selections from the third tractate extend these themes. Sections 1–7 consider the physician who comes to the sick and the Word's presence with the Father and within creation. Sections 15–18 return to Christ's humility and to the question of seeing God. Their locations are identified separately so that the reader can recognize the intervals omitted from the original sermon. Together, these passages show how Augustine holds the Word's eternal divinity, the reality of the incarnation, and the healing of human perception within a single theological inquiry.

Augustine

Tractate 2

Tractates on the Gospel of John · Tractate 2, complete

It is fitting, brothers, that as far as possible we should treat of the text of Holy Scripture, and especially of the Holy Gospel, without omitting any portion, that both we ourselves may derive nourishment according to our capacity, and may minister to you from that source from which we have been nourished. Last Lord’s day, we remember, we treated of the first section; that is, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was nothing made. That which was made, in Him is life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in darkness; and the darkness did not comprehend it.” So far, I believe, had I advanced in the treatment of the passage: let all who were present recall what was then said; and those of you who were not present, believe me and those who chose to be present. Now

therefore,—because we cannot always be repeating everything, out of justice to those who desire to hear what follows, and because repetition of the former thought is a burden to them and deprives them of what succeeds,—let those who were absent on the former occasion refrain from demanding repetition, but, together with those who were here, listen to the present exposition.

It goes on, “There was a man sent from God whose name was John.” Truly, brothers beloved, those things which were said before, were said regarding the ineffable divinity of Christ, and almost ineffably. For who shall comprehend “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God”? And do not allow the name word to appear mean to you, through the habit of daily words, for it is added, “and the Word was God.” This Word is He of whom yesterday we spoke much; and I trust that God was present, and that even from only thus much speaking something reached your hearts. “In the beginning was the Word.” He is the same, and is in the same manner; as He is, so He is always; He cannot be changed; that is, He is. This His name He spoke to His servant Moses: “I am that I am; and He that is has sent me.” Who then shall comprehend this when you see that all mortal things are variable; when you see that not only do bodies vary as to their qualities, by being born, by increasing, by becoming less, by dying, but that even souls themselves through the effect of divers volitions are distended and divided; when you see that men can obtain wisdom if they apply themselves to its light and heat, and also lose wisdom if they remove themselves from it through some evil influence?

When, therefore, you see that all those things are variable, what is that which is, unless that which transcends all things which are so that they are not? Who then can receive this? Or who, in what manner soever he may have applied the strength of his mind to touch that which is, can reach to that which he may in any way have touched with his mind? It is as if one were to see his native land at a distance, and the sea intervening; he sees to where he would go, but he has not the means of going. So we desire to arrive at that our stability where that which is, is, because this alone always is as it is: the sea of this world interrupts our course, even although already we see to where we go; for many do not even see to where they go. That there might be a way by which we could go, He has come from Him to whom we wished to go. And what has He done? He has appointed a tree by which we may cross the sea.

For no one is able to cross the sea of this world, unless borne by the cross of Christ. Even he who is of weak eyesight sometimes embraces this cross; and he who does not see from afar to where he goes, let him not depart from it, and it will carry him over.

Therefore, my brothers, I would desire to have impressed this upon your hearts: if you wish to live in a pious and Christian manner, cling to Christ according to that which He became for us, that you may arrive at Him according

to that which is, and according to that which was. He approached, that for us He might become this; because He became that for us, on which the weak may be borne, and cross the sea of this world and reach their native country; where there will be no need of a ship, for no sea is crossed. It is better then not to see with the mind that which is, and yet not to depart from the cross of Christ, than to see it with the mind, and despise the cross of Christ. It is good beyond this, and best of all, if it be possible, that we both see to where we ought to go, and hold fast that which carries us as we go. This they were able to do, the great minds of the mountains, who have been called mountains, whom the light of divine justice pre-eminently illuminates; they were able to do this, and saw that which is.

For John seeing said, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” They saw this, and in order that they might arrive at that which they saw from afar, they did not depart from the cross of Christ, and did not despise Christ’s lowliness. But little ones who cannot understand this, who do not depart from the cross and passion and resurrection of Christ, are conducted in that same ship to that which they do not see, in which they also arrive who do see.

But truly there have been some philosophers of this world who have sought for the Creator by means of the creature; for He can be found by means of the creature, as the apostle plainly says, “For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and glory; so they are without excuse.” And it follows, “Because that, when they knew God;” he did not say, Because they did not know, but “Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.” How darkened? It follows, when he says more plainly: “Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.” They saw to where they must come; but ungrateful to Him who afforded them what they saw, they wished to ascribe to themselves what they saw; and having become proud, they lost what they saw, and were turned from it to idols and images, and to the worship of demons, to adore the creature and to despise the Creator.

But these having been blinded did those things, and became proud, that they might be blinded: when they were proud they said that they were wise. Those, therefore, concerning whom he said, “Who, when they had known God,” saw this which John says, that by the Word of God all things were made. For these things are also found in the books of the philosophers: and that God has an only-begotten Son, by whom are all things. They were able to see that which is, but they saw it from afar: they were unwilling to hold the lowliness of Christ, in which ship they might have arrived in safety at that which they were able to see from afar and the cross of Christ appeared vile to them. The sea has to be

crossed, and do you despise the wood? Oh, proud wisdom! you laugh to scorn the crucified Christ; it is He whom you do see from afar: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.” But therefore was He crucified? Because the wood of His humiliation was needful to you.

For you had become swollen with pride, and had been cast out far from that fatherland; and by the waves of this world has the way been intercepted, and there is no means of passing to the fatherland unless borne by the wood. Ungrateful one! you laugh Him to scorn who has come to you that you may return: He has become the way, and that through the sea: from there He walked in the sea to show that there is a way in the sea. But you who are not able in any way yourself to walk in the sea, be carried in a ship, be carried by the wood: believe in the crucified One, and you shall arrive there. On account of you He was crucified, to teach you humility; and because if He should come as God, He would not be recognized. For if He should come as God, He would not come to those who were not able to see God. For not according to His Godhead does He either come or depart; since He is everywhere present, and is contained in no place.

But, according to what did He come? He appeared as a man.

Therefore, because He was so man, that the God lay hid in Him, there was sent before Him a great man, by whose testimony He might be found to be more than man. And who is this? “He was a man.” And how could that man speak the truth concerning God? “He was sent by God.” What was he called? “Whose name was John.” Therefore did he come? “He came for a witness, that he might bear witness concerning the light, that all might believe through him.” What sort of man was he who was to bear witness concerning the light? Something great was that John, vast merit, great grace, great loftiness! Admire, by all means, admire; but as it were a mountain. But a mountain is in darkness unless it be clothed with light. Therefore only admire John that you may hear what follows, “He was not that light;” lest if, when you think the mountain to be the light, you make shipwreck on the mountain, and find not consolation. But what ought you to admire? The mountain as a mountain. But lift yourself up to Him who illuminates the mountain, which for this end was elevated that it might be the first to receive the rays, and make them known to your eyes. Therefore, “he was not that light.”

Therefore then did he come? “But that he might bear witness concerning the light.” Why so? “That all might believe through him.” And concerning what light was he to bear witness? “That was the true light.” Therefore is it added true? Because an enlightened man is also called a light; but the true light is that which enlightens. For even our eyes are called lights; and nevertheless, unless either during the night a lamp is lighted, or during the day the sun goes forth, these lights are open in vain. Thus, therefore, John was a light, but not the true light; because, if not enlightened, he would have been darkness; but, by

enlightenment, he became a light. For unless he had been enlightened he would have been darkness, as all those once impious men, to whom, as believers, the apostle said, “You were sometimes darkness.” But now, because they had believed, what?—“but now are you light,” he says, “in the Lord.” Unless he had added “in the Lord,” we should not have understood. “Light,” he says, “in the Lord:” darkness you were not in the Lord. “For you were sometimes darkness,” where he did not add in the Lord. Therefore, darkness in you, light in the Lord. And thus “he was not that light, but was sent to bear witness of the light.”

But where is that light? “He was the true light, which lights every man that comes into the world.” If every man that comes, then also John. The true light, therefore, enlightened him by whom He desired Himself to be pointed out. Understand, beloved, for He came to infirm minds, to wounded hearts, to the gaze of dim-eyed souls. For this purpose had He come. And from where was the soul able to see that which perfectly is? Even as it commonly happens, that by means of some illuminated body, the sun, which we cannot see with the eyes, is known to have arisen. Because even those who have wounded eyes are able to see a wall illuminated and enlightened by the sun, or a mountain, or a tree, or anything of that sort; and, by means of another body illuminated, that arising is shown to those who are not as yet able to gaze on it. Thus, therefore all those to whom Christ came were not fit to see Him: upon John He shed the beams of His light; and by means of him confessing himself to have been irradiated and enlightened, not claiming to be one who irradiates and enlightens, He is known who enlightens, He is known who illuminates, He is known who fills.

And who is it? “He who lights every man,” he says, “who comes into the world.” For if man had not receded from that light, he would not have required to be illuminated; but for this reason has he to be illuminated here, because he departed from that light by which man might always have been illuminated.

What then? If He came here, where was He? “He was in this world.” He was both here and came here; He was here according to His divinity, and He came here according to the flesh; because when He was here according to His divinity, He could not be seen by the foolish, by the blind, and the wicked. These wicked men are the darkness concerning which it was said, “The light shines in darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.” Look, both here He is now, and here He was, and here He is always; and He never departs, goes nowhere. There is need that you have some means by which you may see that which never departs from you; there is need that you depart not from Him who goes nowhere; there is need that you desert not, and you shall not be deserted. Do not fall, and His sun will not set to you. If you fall, His sun sets upon you; but if you stand, He is present with you. But you have not stood: remember how you have fallen, how he who fell before you cast you down.

For he cast you down, not by violence, not by assault, but by your own will. For had you not consented to evil, you would have stood, you would have remained enlightened. But now, because you have already fallen, and have become wounded in heart,—the organ by which that light can be seen,—He came to you such as you might see; and He in such fashion manifested Himself as man, that He sought testimony from man. From man God seeks testimony, and God has man as a witness;—God has man as a witness, but on account of man: so infirm are we. By a lamp we seek the day; because John himself was called a lamp, the Lord saying, “He was a burning and a shining light; and you were willing for a season to rejoice in his light: but I have greater witness than John.”

Therefore He showed that for the sake of men He desired to have Himself revealed by a lamp to the faith of those who believed, that by means of the same lamp His enemies might be confounded. There were enemies who tempted Him, and said, “Tell us by what authority do you these things?” “I also,” says He, “will ask you one question; answer me. The baptism of John, from where was it? from heaven, or of men? And they were troubled, and said among themselves, If we shall say, From heaven, he will say to us, Why did you not believe him?” (Because he had borne testimony to Christ, and had said, I am not the Christ, but He. “But if we shall say, Of men, we fear the people, lest they should stone us: for they held John as a prophet.” Afraid of stoning, but fearing more to confess the truth, they answered a lie to the Truth; and “wickedness imposed a lie upon itself.” For they said, “We know not.” And the Lord, because they shut the door against themselves, by professing ignorance of what they knew, did not open to them, because they did not knock.

For it is said, “Knock, and it shall be opened to you.” Not only did these not knock that it might be opened to them; but, by denying that they knew, they barred that door against themselves. And the Lord says to them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.” And they were confounded by means of John; and in them were the words fulfilled, “I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed. His enemies will I clothe with shame.”

“He was in the world, and the world was made by Him.” Think not that He was in the world as the earth is in the world, as the sky is in the world, as the sun is in the world, the moon and the stars, trees, cattle, and men. He was not thus in the world. But in what manner then? As the Artificer governing what He had made. For He did not make it as a carpenter makes a chest. The chest which he makes is outside the carpenter, and so it is put in another place, while being made; and although the workman is nigh, he sits in another place, and is external to that which he fashions. But God, infused into the world, fashions it; being everywhere present He fashions, and withdraws not Himself elsewhere, nor does He, as it were, handle from without, the matter which He fashions. By

the presence of His majesty He makes what He makes; His presence governs what He made. Therefore was He in the world as the Maker of the world; for, “The world was made by Him, and the world did not know Him.”

What means “the world was made by Him”? The heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things which are in it, are called the world. Again, in another signification, those who love the world are called the world. “The world was made by Him, and the world did not know Him.” Did not the heavens know their Creator, or did the angels not know their Creator, or did the stars not know their Creator, whom the demons confess? All things from all sides gave testimony. But who did not know? Those who, for their love of the world, are called the world. By loving we dwell with the heart; but because of their loving the world they deserved to be called after the name of that in which they dwelt. In the same manner as we say, This house is bad, or this house is good, we do not in calling the one bad or the other good accuse or praise the walls; but by a bad house we mean a house with bad inhabitants, and by a good house, a house with good inhabitants.

In like manner we call those the world who by loving it, inhabit the world. Who are they? Those who love the world; for they dwell with their hearts in the world. For those who do not love the world in the flesh, indeed, sojourn in the world, but in their hearts they dwell in heaven, as the apostle says, “Our conversation is in heaven.” Therefore “the world was made by Him, and the world did not know Him.”

“He came to His own,”—because all these things were made by Him,—“and His own did not receive Him.” Who are they? The men whom He made. The Jews whom He at the first made to be above all nations. Because other nations worshiped idols and served demons; but that people was born of the seed of Abraham, and in an eminent sense His own, because kindred through that flesh which He deigned to assume. “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.” Did they not receive Him at all? did no one receive Him? Was there no one saved? For no one shall be saved unless he who shall have received the coming Christ.

But John adds: “As many as received Him.” What did He afford to them? Great benevolence! Great mercy! He was born the only Son of God, and was unwilling to remain alone. Many men, when they have not sons, in advanced age adopt a son, and thus obtain by an exercise of will what nature has denied to them: this men do. But if any one have an only son, he rejoices the more in him; because he alone will possess everything, and he will not have any one to divide with him the inheritance, so that he should be poorer. Not so God: that same only Son whom He had begotten, and by whom He created all things, He sent into this world that He might not be alone, but might have adopted brothers. For we were not born of God in the manner in which the Only-begotten was born of Him, but

were adopted by His grace. For He, the Only-begotten, came to loose the sins in which we were entangled, and whose burden hindered our adoption: those whom He wished to make brothers to Himself, He Himself loosed, and made joint-heirs.

For so says the apostle, “But if a son, then an heir through God.” And again, “Heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” He did not fear to have joint-heirs, because His heritage does not become narrow if many are possessors. Those very persons, He being possessor, become His inheritance, and He in turn becomes their inheritance. Hear in what manner they become His inheritance: “The Lord has said to me, You are my Son, this day have I begotten You. Ask of me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance.” Hear in what manner He becomes their inheritance. He says in the Psalms: “The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance, and of my cup.” Let us possess Him, and let Him possess us: let Him possess us as Lord; let us possess Him as salvation, let us possess Him as light. What then did He give to them who received Him? “To them He gave power to become sons of God, even to them that believe on His name;” that they may cling to the wood and cross the sea.

And how are they born? Because they become sons of God and brothers of Christ, they are certainly born. For if they are not born, how can they be sons? But the sons of men are born of flesh and blood, and of the will of man, and of the embrace of wedlock. But in what manner are they born? “Who not of bloods,” as if of male and female. Bloods is not Latin; but because it is plural in Greek, the interpreter preferred so to express it, and to speak bad Latin according to the grammarian that he might make the matter plain to the understanding of the weak among his hearers. For if he had said blood in the singular number, he would not have explained what he desired; for men are born of the bloods of male and female. Let us say so, then, and not fear the ferule of grammarians, so long as we reach the solid and certain truth. He who understands it and blames it, is thankless for his having understood. “Not of bloods, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man.” The apostle puts flesh for woman; because, when she was made of his rib, Adam said, “This is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh.” And the apostle says, “He that loves his wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh.” Flesh, then, is put for woman, in the same manner that spirit is sometimes put for husband.

Therefore? Because the one rules, the other is ruled; the one ought to command, the other to serve. For where the flesh commands and the spirit serves, the house is turned the wrong way. What can be worse than a house where the woman has the mastery over the man? But that house is rightly ordered where the man commands and the woman obeys. In like manner that man is rightly ordered where the spirit commands and the flesh serves.

These, then, “were born not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” But that men might be born of God, God was first born of them. For Christ is God, and Christ was born of men. It was only a mother, indeed, that He sought upon earth; because He had already a Father in heaven: He by whom we were to be created was born of God, and He by whom we were to be re-created was born of a woman. Marvel not, then, O man, that you are made a son by grace, that you are born of God according to His Word. The Word Himself first chose to be born of man, that you might be born of God to salvation, and say to yourself, Not without reason did God wish to be born of man, but because He counted me of some importance, that He might make me immortal, and for me be born as a mortal man. When, therefore, he had said, “born of God,” lest we should, as it were, be filled with amazement and trembling at such grace, at grace so great as to exceed belief that men are born of God, as if assuring you, he says, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” Why, then, do you marvel that men are born of God?

Consider God Himself born of men: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.”

But because “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,” by His very nativity he made an eye-salve to cleanse the eyes of our heart, and to enable us to see His majesty by means of His humility. Therefore “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us:” He healed our eyes; and what follows? “And we beheld His glory.” His glory can no one see unless healed by the humility of His flesh. Therefore were we not able to see? Consider, then, dearly beloved, and see what I say. There had dashed into man’s eye, as it were, dust, earth; it had wounded the eye, and it could not see the light: that wounded eye is anointed; by earth it was wounded, and earth is applied to it for healing. For all eye-salves and medicines are derived from the earth alone. By dust you were blinded, and by dust you are healed: flesh, then, had wounded you, flesh heals you. The soul had become carnal by consenting to the affections of the flesh; thus had the eye of the heart been blinded.

“The Word was made flesh:” that Physician made for you an eye-salve. And as He thus came by flesh to extinguish the vices of the flesh, and by death to slay death; therefore did this take place in you, that, as “the Word became flesh,” you may be able to say, “And we beheld His glory.” What sort of glory? Such as He became as Son of man? That was His humility, not His glory. But to what is the sight of man brought when cured by means of flesh? “We beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Of grace and truth we shall speak more fully in another place in this same Gospel, if the Lord vouchsafe us opportunity. Let these things suffice for the present, and be you edified in Christ: be you comforted in faith, and watch in good works, and see that you do not depart from the wood by which you may cross the sea.

Tractate 3 Sections 1 to 7

Tractates on the Gospel of John · Tractate 3, sections 1–7

We undertook, in the name of the Lord, and promised to you, beloved, to treat of that grace and truth of God, full of which the only-begotten Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, appeared to the saints, and to show how, as a matter belonging to the New Testament, it is to be distinguished from the Old Testament. Give, then, your attention that what I receive in my measure from God you in your measure may receive and hear the same. For it will only remain if, when the seed is scattered in your hearts, the birds take it not away, nor thorns choke it, nor heat scorch it, and there descend upon it the rain of daily exhortations and your own good thoughts, by which that is done in the heart which in the field is done by means of harrows, so that the clod is broken, and the seed covered and enabled to germinate: that you bear fruit at which the husbandman may be glad and rejoice. But if, in return for good seed and good rain, you bring forth not fruit but thorns, the seed will not be blamed, nor will the rain be in fault; but for thorns due fire is prepared.

I do not think that I need spend much time in endeavoring to persuade you that we are Christian men; and if Christians, by virtue of the name, belonging to Christ. Upon the forehead we bear His sign; and we do not blush because of it, if we also bear it in the heart. His sign is His humility. By a star the Magi knew Him; and this sign was given by the Lord, and it was heavenly and beautiful. He did not desire that a star should be His sign on the forehead of the faithful, but His cross. By it humbled, by it also glorified; by it He raised the humble, even by that to which He, when humbled, descended. We belong, then, to the gospel, we belong to the New Testament. “The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” We ask the apostle, and he says to us, since we are not under the law but under grace. “He sent therefore His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, that He might redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” Look, for this end Christ came, that He might redeem those who were under the law; that now we may not be under the law, but under grace.

Who, then, gave the law? He gave the law who gave likewise grace; but the law He sent by a servant, with grace He Himself came down. And in what manner were men made under the law? By not fulfilling the law. For he who fulfills the law is not under the law, but with the law; but he who is under the law is not raised up, but pressed down by the law. All men, therefore, being placed under the law, are by the law made guilty; and for this purpose it is over their head, that it may show sins, not take them away. The law then commands, the Giver of the law shows pity in that which the law commands. Men, endeavoring by their own strength to fulfill that which the law commands, fell by

their own rash and headstrong presumption; and not with the law, but under the law, became guilty: and since by their own strength they were unable to fulfill the law, and were become guilty under the law, they implored the aid of the Deliverer; and the guilt which the law brought caused sickness to the proud.

The sickness of the proud became the confession of the humble. Now the sick confess that they are sick; let the physician come to heal the sick.

Who is the Physician? Our Lord Jesus Christ. Who is our Lord Jesus Christ? He who was seen even by those by whom He was crucified. He who was seized, buffeted, scourged, spit upon, crowned with thorns, suspended upon the cross, died, pierced by the spear, taken down from the cross, laid in the sepulcher. That same Jesus Christ our Lord, that same Jesus exactly, He is the complete Physician of our wounds. That crucified One at whom insults were cast, and while He hung on the cross His persecutors wagging the head, and saying, “If he be the Son of God, let him come down from the cross,”—He, and no other, is our complete Physician. Therefore, then, did He not show to his deriders that He was the Son of God; so that if He allowed Himself to be lifted up upon the cross, at least when they said, “If he be the Son of God, let him come down from the cross,” He should then come down, and show to them that He was the very Son of God whom they had dared to deride?

He would not. Therefore would He not? Was it because He could not? Manifestly He could. For which is greater, to descend from the cross or to rise from the sepulcher? But He bore with His insulters; for the cross was taken not as a proof of power, but as an example of patience. There He cured your wounds, where He long bore His own; there He healed you of death eternal, where He vouchsafed to die the temporal death. And did He die, or in Him did death die? What a death was that, which slew death!

Is it, however, our Lord Jesus Christ Himself—His whole self—who was seen, and held, and crucified? Is the whole very self that? It is the same, but not the whole, that which the Jews saw; this is not the whole Christ. And what is? “In the beginning was the Word.” In what beginning? “And the Word was with God.” And what word? “And the Word was God.” Was then perhaps this Word made by God? No. For “the same was in the beginning with God.” What then? Are the other things which God made not like to the Word? No: because “all things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made.” In what manner were all things made by Him? Because “that which was made in Him was life;” and before it was made there was life. That which was made is not life; but in the art, that is, in the wisdom of God, before it was made, it was life. That which was made passes away; that which is in wisdom cannot pass away. There was life, therefore, in that which was made.

And what sort of life, since the soul also is the life of the body? Our body has its own life; and when it has lost it, the death of the body ensues. Was then the

life such as this? No; but “the life was the light of men.” Was it the light of cattle? For this light is the light of men and of cattle. There is a certain light of men: let us see how far men differ from the cattle, and then we shall understand what is the light of men. You do not differ from the cattle except in intellect; do not glory in anything besides. Do you presume upon your strength? By the wild beasts you are surpassed. Upon your swiftness do you presume? By the flies you are surpassed. Upon your beauty do you presume? How great beauty is there in the feathers of a peacock! In which then are you better? In the image of God. Where is the image of God? In the mind, in the intellect. If then you are in this respect better than the cattle, that you have a mind by which you may understand what the cattle cannot understand; and in it a man, because better than the cattle; the light of men is the light of minds.

The light of minds is above minds and surpasses all minds. This was that life by which all things were made.

Where was it? Was it here? was it with the Father, and was it not here? or, what is more true, was it both with the Father and here also? If then it was here, therefore was it not seen? Because “the light shines in darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.” Oh men, be not darkness, be not unbelieving, unjust, unrighteous, rapacious, avaricious lovers of this world: for these are the darkness. The light is not absent, but you are absent from the light. A blind man in the sunshine has the sun present to him, but is himself absent from the sun. Be you not then darkness. For this is perhaps the grace regarding which we are about to speak, that now we be no more darkness, and that the apostle may say to us, “We were sometime darkness, but now light in the Lord.” Because then the light of men was not seen, that is, the light of minds, there was a necessity that a man should give testimony regarding the light, who was not in darkness, but who was already enlightened; and nevertheless, because enlightened, not the light itself, “but that He might bear witness of the light.” For “he was not that light.” And what was the light?

“That was the true light which enlightened every man that comes into the world.” And where was that light? “In this world it was.” And how was it “in this world?” As the light of the sun, of the moon, and of lamps, was that light thus in the world? No. Because “the world was made by Him, and the world did not know Him;” that is, “the light shines in darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.” For the world is darkness; because the lovers of the world are the world. For did not the creature acknowledge its Creator? The heavens gave testimony by a star; the sea gave testimony, and bore its Lord when He walked upon it; the winds gave testimony, and were quiet at His bidding; the earth gave testimony, and trembled when He was crucified. If all these gave testimony, in what sense did the world not know Him, unless that the world signifies the lovers of the world, those who with their hearts dwell in the world? And the

world is evil, because the inhabitants of the world are evil; just as a house is evil, not because of its walls, but because of its inhabitants.

“He came to His own;” that is, He came to that which belonged to Himself; “and His own did not receive Him.” What, then, is the hope, unless that “as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God”? If they become sons, they are born; if born, how are they born? Not of flesh, “nor of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man; but of God are they born.” Let them rejoice, therefore, that they are born of God; let them believe that they are born of God; let them receive the proof that they are born of God: “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.” If the Word was not ashamed to be born of man, are men ashamed to be born of God? And because He did this, He cured us; and because He cured us, we see. For this, “that the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,” became a medicine to us, so that as by earth we were made blind, by earth we might be healed; and having been healed, might behold what? “And we beheld,” he says, “His glory, the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

“John bears witness of Him, and cries, saying, This was He of whom I spoke, He that comes after me is made before me.” He came after me, and He preceded me. What is it, “He is made before me”? He preceded me. Not was made before I was made, but was preferred before me, this is “He was made before me.” Therefore was He made before you, when He came after you? “Because He was before me.” Before you, O John! what great thing to be before you! It is well that you do bear witness to Him; let us, however, hear Himself saying, “Even before Abraham, I am.” But Abraham also was born in the midst of the human race: there were many before him, many after him. Listen to the voice of the Father to the Son: “Before Lucifer I have begotten You.” He who was begotten before Lucifer Himself illuminates all. A certain one was named Lucifer, who fell; for he was an angel and became a devil; and concerning him the Scripture said, “Lucifer, who did arise in the morning, fell.” And why was he Lucifer?

Because, being enlightened, he gave forth light. But for what reason did he become dark! Because he abode not in the truth. Therefore He was before Lucifer, before every one that is enlightened; since before every one that is enlightened, of necessity He must be by whom all are enlightened who can be enlightened.

Tractate 3 Sections 15 to 18

Tractates on the Gospel of John · Tractate 3, sections 15–18

I speak, my brothers, regarding the humility of Christ. Who can speak regarding the majesty of Christ, and the divinity of Christ? In explaining and speaking of the humility of Christ, to do so in any fashion we find ourselves not sufficient, indeed wholly insufficient: we commend Him entire to your thoughts,

we do not endeavor to fill Him up to your hearing. Consider the humility of Christ. But who, you say, may explain it to us, unless you declare it? Let Him declare it within. Better does He declare it who dwells within, than he who cries without. Let Himself show to you the grace of His humility, who has begun to dwell in your hearts. But now, if in explaining and setting forth His humility we are deficient, who can speak of His majesty? If “the Word made flesh” disturbs us, who shall explain “In the beginning was the Word”? Keep hold then, brothers, upon the entireness of Christ.

“The law was given by Moses: grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” By a servant was the law given, and made men guilty: by an Emperor was pardon given, and delivered the guilty. “The law was given by Moses.” Let not the servant attribute to himself more than was done through him. Chosen to a great ministry as one faithful in his house, but yet a servant, he is able to act according to the law, but cannot release from the guilt of the law. “The law,” then, “was given by Moses: grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.”

And lest, perhaps, any one should say, And did not grace and truth come through Moses, who saw God, immediately he adds, “No one has seen God at any time.” And how did God become known to Moses? Because the Lord revealed Himself to His servant. What Lord? The same Christ, who sent the law beforehand by His servant, that He might Himself come with grace and truth. “For no one has seen God at any time.” And from where did He appear to that servant as far as he was able to receive Him? But “the Only-begotten,” he says, “who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.” What signifies “in the bosom of the Father?” In the secret of the Father. For God has not a bosom, as we have, in our garments, nor is He to be thought of sitting, as we do, nor is He girt with a girdle so as to have a bosom; but because our bosom is within, the secret of the Father is called the bosom of the Father.

And He who knew the Father, being in the secret of the Father, He declared Him. “For no man has seen God at any time.” He then came and narrated whatever He saw. What did Moses see? Moses saw a cloud, he saw an angel, he saw a fire. All that is the creature: it bore the type of its Lord, but did not manifest the presence of the Lord Himself. For you have it plainly stated in the law: “And Moses spoke with the Lord face to face, as a friend with his friend.” Following the same scripture, you find Moses saying: “If I have found grace in Your sight, show me Yourself plainly, that I may see You.” And it is little that he said this: he received the reply, “You cannot see my face.” An angel then spoke with Moses, my brothers, bearing the type of the Lord; and all those things which were done by the angel promised that future grace and truth. Those who examine the law well know this; and when we have opportunity to speak somewhat of this matter also, we shall not fail to speak to you, beloved brothers, as far as the Lord may reveal to us.

But know this, that all those things which were seen in bodily form were not that substance of God. For we saw those things with the eyes of the flesh: how is the substance of God seen? Interrogate the Gospel: “Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God.” There have been men who, deceived by the vanity of their hearts, have said, The Father is invisible, but the Son is visible. How visible? If on account of His flesh, because He took flesh, the matter is manifest. For of those who saw the flesh of Christ, some believed, some crucified; and those who believed doubted when He was crucified; and unless they had touched the flesh after the resurrection, their faith would not have been recalled. If, then, on account of His flesh the Son was visible, that we also grant, and it is the Catholic faith; but if before He took flesh, as they say, that is, before He became incarnate, they are greatly deluded, and grievously err. For those visible and bodily appearances took place though the creature, in which a type might be exhibited: not in any fashion was the substance itself shown and made manifest.

Give heed, beloved brothers, to this easy proof. The wisdom of God cannot be beheld by the eyes. Brothers, if Christ is the Wisdom of God and the Power of God; if Christ is the Word of God, and if the word of man is not seen with the eyes, can the Word of God be so seen?

Reading Notes

1. Tractate 2 is complete. Tractate 3 is excerpted in two separately identified continuous selections: sections 1–7 and 15–18. Sections 8–14 and 19–21 are not reproduced in this chapter.

2. Augustine's references to grace, the law, and healing form part of his explanation of the incarnation and the human reception of the Word.

CHAPTER 6

The Divine Word and the Human Word

A word can be spoken aloud, imagined as a sound, or understood inwardly before a particular language is chosen. Augustine places the strongest analogy with the divine Word at this inward level. Outward speech becomes a sign of what the mind understands.

The selection preserves On the Trinity XV.10–16 continuously, including the discussion of knowledge and skepticism that serves its central comparison. Human beings know some things directly and receive others through sensation or testimony. They can possess knowledge without constantly expressing it, yet their knowledge can be forgotten, incomplete, or confused with supposition.

Augustine then examines the analogy's limits. The divine Word does not pass through uncertainty before becoming true. The Father's knowledge is neither acquired from an external source nor imperfectly expressed in the Word. The mind's experience offers an image that requires careful interpretation. His argument invites close attention to ordinary thinking while preserving the difference between a changing human mind and the divine life.

Augustine

The Inner Word and the Eternal Word

On the Trinity · Book XV, chapters 10–16, sections 17–26

But let us now speak of those things of which we think as known, and have in our knowledge even if we do not think of them; whether they belong to the contemplative knowledge, which, as I have argued, is properly to be called wisdom, or to the active which is properly to be called knowledge. For both together belong to one mind, and are one image of God. But when we treat of the lower of the two distinctly and separately, then it is not to be called an image of God, although even then, too, some likeness of that Trinity may be found in it; as we showed in the thirteenth book. We speak now, therefore, of the entire knowledge of man altogether, in which whatever is known to us is known; that, at any rate, which is true; otherwise it would not be known. For no one knows what is false, except when he knows it to be false; and if he knows this, then he knows what is true: for it is true that that is false.

We treat, therefore, now of those things which we think as known, and which are known to us even if they are not being thought of. But certainly, if we would

utter them in words, we can only do so by thinking them. For although there were no words spoken, at any rate, he who thinks speaks in his heart. And hence that passage in the book of Wisdom: “They said within themselves, thinking not aright.” For the words, “They said within themselves,” are explained by the addition of “thinking.” A like passage to this is that in the Gospel,—that certain scribes, when they heard the Lord’s words to the paralytic man, “Be of good cheer, my son, your sins are forgiven you,” said within themselves, “This man blasphemes.” For how did they “say within themselves,” except by thinking? Then follows, “And when Jesus saw their thoughts, He said, Why think you evil in your thoughts?” So far Matthew. But Luke narrates the same thing thus: “The scribes and Pharisees began to think, saying, Who is this that speaks blasphemies?

Who can forgive sins but God alone? But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He, answering, said to them, What think you in your hearts?” That which in the book of Wisdom is, “They said, thinking,” is the same here with, “They thought, saying.” For both there and here it is declared, that they spoke within themselves, and in their own heart, i.e. spoke by thinking. For they “spoke within themselves,” and it was said to them, “What think you?” And the Lord Himself says of that rich man whose ground brought forth plentifully, “And he thought within himself, saying.”

Some thoughts, then, are speeches of the heart, in which the Lord also shows that there is a mouth, when He says, “Not that which enters into the mouth defiles a man; but that which proceeds out of the mouth, that defiles a man.” In one sentence He has comprised two diverse mouths of the man, one of the body, one of the heart. For assuredly, that from which they thought the man to be defiled, enters into the mouth of the body; but that from which the Lord said the man was defiled, proceeds out of the mouth of the heart. So certainly He Himself explained what He had said. For a little after, He says also to His disciples concerning the same thing: “Are you also yet without understanding? Do you not understand, that whatever enters in at the mouth goes into the belly, and is cast out into the draught?” Here He most certainly pointed to the mouth of the body. But in that which follows He plainly speaks of the mouth of the heart, where He says, “But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.

For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts,” etc. What is clearer than this explanation? And yet, when we call thoughts speeches of the heart, it does not follow that they are not also acts of sight, arising from the sight of knowledge, when they are true. For when these things are done outwardly by means of the body, then speech and sight are different things; but when we think inwardly, the two are one,—just as sight and hearing are two things mutually distinct in the bodily senses, but to see and hear are the same thing in the mind; and hence,

while speech is not seen but rather heard outwardly, yet the inward speeches, i.e. thoughts, are said by the holy Gospel to have been seen, not heard, by the Lord. “They said within themselves, This man blasphemes,” says the Gospel; and then subjoined, “And when Jesus saw their thoughts.” Therefore He saw, what they said. For by His own thought He saw their thoughts, which they supposed no one saw but themselves.

Whoever, then, is able to understand a word, not only before it is uttered in sound, but also before the images of its sounds are considered in thought,—for this it is which belongs to no tongue, namely, of those which are called the tongues of nations, of which our Latin tongue is one;—whoever, I say, is able to understand this, is able now to see through this glass and in this enigma some likeness of that Word of whom it is said, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” For of necessity, when we speak what is true, i.e. speak what we know, there is born from the knowledge itself which the memory retains, a word that is altogether of the same kind with that knowledge from which it is born. For the thought that is formed by the thing which we know, is the word which we speak in the heart: which word is neither Greek nor Latin, nor of any other tongue. But when it is needful to convey this to the knowledge of those to whom we speak, then some sign is assumed by which to signify it.

And generally a sound, sometimes a nod, is exhibited, the former to the ears, the latter to the eyes, that the word which we bear in our mind may become known also by bodily signs to the bodily senses. For what is to nod or beckon, except to speak in some way to the sight? And Holy Scripture gives its testimony to this; for we read in the Gospel according to John: “Verily, verily, I say to you, that one of you shall betray me. Then the disciples looked one upon another, doubting of whom He spoke. Now there was leaning on Jesus’ breast one of His disciples whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore beckons to him, and says to him, Who is it of whom He speaks?” Here he spoke by beckoning what he did not venture to speak by sounds. But whereas we exhibit these and the like bodily signs either to ears or eyes of persons present to whom we speak, letters have been invented that we might be able to converse also with the absent; but these are signs of words, as words themselves are signs in our conversation of those things which we think.

Accordingly, the word that sounds outwardly is the sign of the word that gives light inwardly; which latter has the greater claim to be called a word. For that which is uttered with the mouth of the flesh, is the articulate sound of a word; and is itself also called a word, on account of that to make which outwardly apparent it is itself assumed. For our word is so made in some way into an articulate sound of the body, by assuming that articulate sound by which it may be manifested to men’s senses, as the Word of God was made flesh, by assuming

that flesh in which itself also might be manifested to men's senses. And as our word becomes an articulate sound, yet is not changed into one; so the Word of God became flesh, but far be it from us to say He was changed into flesh. For both that word of ours became an articulate sound, and that other Word became flesh, by assuming it, not by consuming itself so as to be changed into it.

And therefore whoever desires to arrive at any likeness, be it of what sort it may, of the Word of God, however in many respects unlike, must not regard the word of ours that sounds in the ears, either when it is uttered in an articulate sound or when it is silently thought. For the words of all tongues that are uttered in sound are also silently thought, and the mind runs over verses while the bodily mouth is silent. And not only the numbers of syllables, but the tunes also of songs, since they are corporeal, and pertain to that sense of the body which is called hearing, are at hand by certain incorporeal images appropriate to them, to those who think of them, and who silently revolve all these things. But we must pass by this, in order to arrive at that word of man, by the likeness of which, be it of what sort it may, the Word of God may be somehow seen as in an enigma. Not that word which was spoken to this or that prophet, and of which it is said, "Now the word of God grew and multiplied;" and again, "Faith then comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ;" and again, "When you received the word of God which you heard of us, you received it not as the word of men but, as it is in truth, the word of God" (and there are countless other like sayings in the Scriptures respecting the word of God, which is disseminated in the sounds of many and diverse languages through the hearts and mouths of men; and which is therefore called the word of God, because the doctrine that is delivered is not human, but divine);—but we are now seeking to see, in whatever way we can, by means of this likeness, that Word of God of which it is said, "The Word was God;" of which it is said, "All things were made by Him;" of which it is said, "The Word became flesh;" of which it is said "The Word of God on high is the fountain of wisdom." We must go on, then, to that word of man, to the word of the rational animal, to the word of that image of God, that is not born of God, but made by God; which is neither utterable in sound nor capable of being thought under the likeness of sound such as must needs be with the word of any tongue; but which precedes all the signs by which it is signified, and is begotten from the knowledge that continues in the mind, when that same knowledge is spoken inwardly according as it really is.

For the sight of thinking is exceedingly like the sight of knowledge. For when it is uttered by sound, or by any bodily sign, it is not uttered according as it really is, but as it can be seen or heard by the body. When, therefore, that is in the word which is in the knowledge, then there is a true word, and truth, such as is looked for from man; such that what is in the knowledge is also in the word, and what is not in the knowledge is also not in the word. Here may be

recognized, “Yes, yes; no, no.” And so this likeness of the image that is made, approaches as nearly as is possible to that likeness of the image that is born, by which God the Son is declared to be in all things like in substance to the Father. We must notice in this enigma also another likeness of the word of God; viz. that, as it is said of that Word, “All things were made by Him,” where God is declared to have made the universe by His only-begotten Son, so there are no works of man that are not first spoken in his heart: hence it is written, “A word is the beginning of every work.” But here also, it is when the word is true, that then it is the beginning of a good work.

And a word is true when it is begotten from the knowledge of working good works, so that there too may be preserved the “yes yes, no no;” in order that whatever is in that knowledge by which we are to live, may be also in the word by which we are to work, and whatever is not in the one may not be in the other. Otherwise such a word will be a lie, not truth; and what comes from there will be a sin, and not a good work. There is yet this other likeness of the Word of God in this likeness of our word, that there can be a word of ours with no work following it, but there cannot be any work unless a word precedes; just as the Word of God could have existed though no creature existed, but no creature could exist unless by that Word by which all things are made. And therefore not God the Father, not the Holy Spirit, not the Trinity itself, but the Son only, which is the Word of God, was made flesh; although the Trinity was the maker: in order that we might live rightly through our word following and imitating His example, i.e. by having no lie in either the thought or the work of our word.

But this perfection of this image is one to be at some time hereafter. In order to attain this it is that the good master teaches us by Christian faith, and by pious doctrine, that “with face unveiled” from the veil of the law, which is the shadow of things to come, “beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord,” i.e. gazing at it through a mirror, “we may be transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord;” as we explained above.

When, therefore, this image shall have been renewed to perfection by this transformation, then we shall be like God, because we shall see Him, not through a mirror, but “as He is;” which the Apostle Paul expresses by “face to face.” But now, who can explain how great is the unlikeness also, in this glass, in this enigma, in this likeness such as it is? Yet I will touch upon some points, as I can, by which to indicate it.

First, of what sort and how great is the very knowledge itself that a man can attain, be he ever so skillful and learned, by which our thought is formed with truth, when we speak what we know? For to pass by those things that come into the mind from the bodily senses, among which so many are otherwise than they seem to be, that he who is overmuch pressed down by their resemblance to truth, seems sane to himself, but really is not sane;—which is why the Academic

philosophy has so prevailed as to be still more wretchedly insane by doubting all things;—passing by, then, those things that come into the mind by the bodily senses, how large a proportion is left of things which we know in such manner as we know that we live? In regard to this, indeed, we are absolutely without any fear lest perhaps we are being deceived by some resemblance of the truth; since it is certain, that he who is deceived, yet lives. And this again is not reckoned among those objects of sight that are presented from without, so that the eye may be deceived in it; in such way as it is when an oar in the water looks bent, and towers seem to move as you sail past them, and a thousand other things that are otherwise than they seem to be: for this is not a thing that is discerned by the eye of the flesh.

The knowledge by which we know that we live is the most inward of all knowledge, of which even the Academic cannot insinuate: Perhaps you are asleep, and do not know it, and you see things in your sleep. For who does not know that what people see in dreams is precisely like what they see when awake? But he who is certain of the knowledge of his own life, does not in it say, I know I am awake, but, I know I am alive; therefore, whether he be asleep or awake, he is alive. Nor can he be deceived in that knowledge by dreams; since it belongs to a living man both to sleep and to see in sleep. Nor can the Academic again say, in confutation of this knowledge: Perhaps you are mad, and do not know it: for what madmen see is precisely like what they also see who are sane; but he who is mad is alive. Nor does he answer the Academic by saying, I know I am not mad, but, I know I am alive.

Therefore he who says he knows he is alive, can neither be deceived nor lie. Let a thousand kinds, then, of deceitful objects of sight be presented to him who says, I know I am alive; yet he will fear none of them, for he who is deceived yet is alive. But if such things alone pertain to human knowledge, they are very few indeed; unless that they can be so multiplied in each kind, as not only not to be few, but to reach in the result to infinity. For he who says, I know I am alive, says that he knows one single thing. Further, if he says, I know that I know I am alive, now there are two; but that he knows these two is a third thing to know. And so he can add a fourth and a fifth, and innumerable others, if he holds out. But since he cannot either comprehend an innumerable number by additions of units, or say a thing innumerable times, he comprehends this at least, and with perfect certainty, viz. that this is both true and so innumerable that he cannot truly comprehend and say its infinite number.

This same thing may be noticed also in the case of a will that is certain. For it would be an impudent answer to make to any one who should say, I will to be happy, that perhaps you are deceived. And if he should say, I know that I will this, and I know that I know it, he can add yet a third to these two, viz. that he knows these two; and a fourth, that he knows that he knows these two; and so on

ad infinitum. Likewise, if any one were to say, I will not to be mistaken; will it not be true, whether he is mistaken or whether he is not, that nevertheless he does will not to be mistaken? Would it not be most impudent to say to him, Perhaps you are deceived? when beyond doubt, whereinsoever he may be deceived, he is nevertheless not deceived in thinking that he wills not to be deceived. And if he says he knows this, he adds any number he chooses of things known, and perceives that number to be infinite.

For he who says, I will not to be deceived, and I know that I will not to be so, and I know that I know it, is able now to set forth an infinite number here also, however awkward may be the expression of it. And other things too are to be found capable of refuting the Academics, who contend that man can know nothing. But we must restrict ourselves, especially as this is not the subject we have undertaken in the present work. There are three books of ours on that subject, written in the early time of our conversion, which he who can and will read, and who understands them, will doubtless not be much moved by any of the many arguments which they have found out against the discovery of truth. For whereas there are two kinds of knowable things,—one, of those things which the mind perceives by the bodily senses; the other, of those which it perceives by itself,—these philosophers have babbled much against the bodily senses, but have never been able to throw doubt upon those most certain perceptions of things true, which the mind knows by itself, such as is that which I have mentioned, I know that I am alive.

But far be it from us to doubt the truth of what we have learned by the bodily senses; since by them we have learned to know the heaven and the earth, and those things in them which are known to us, so far as He who created both us and them has willed them to be within our knowledge. Far be it from us too to deny, that we know what we have learned by the testimony of others: otherwise we know not that there is an ocean; we know not that the lands and cities exist which most copious report commends to us; we know not that those men were, and their works, which we have learned by reading history; we know not the news that is daily brought us from this quarter or that, and confirmed by consistent and conspiring evidence; lastly, we know not at what place or from whom we have been born: since in all these things we have believed the testimony of others. And if it is most absurd to say this, then we must confess, that not only our own senses, but those of other persons also, have added very much indeed to our knowledge.

All these things, then, both those which the human mind knows by itself, and those which it knows by the bodily senses, and those which it has received and knows by the testimony of others, are laid up and retained in the storehouse of the memory; and from these is begotten a word that is true when we speak what we know, but a word that is before all sound, before all thought of a sound. For

the word is then most like to the thing known, from which also its image is begotten, since the sight of thinking arises from the sight of knowledge; when it is a word belonging to no tongue, but is a true word concerning a true thing, having nothing of its own, but wholly derived from that knowledge from which it is born. Nor does it signify when he learned it, who speaks what he knows; for sometimes he says it immediately upon learning it; provided only that the word is true, i.e. sprung from things that are known.

But is it so, that God the Father, from whom is born the Word that is God of God,—is it so, then, that God the Father, in respect to that wisdom which He is to Himself, has learned some things by His bodily senses, and others by Himself? Who could say this, who thinks of God, not as a rational animal, but as One above the rational soul? So far at least as He can be thought of, by those who place Him above all animals and all souls, although they see Him by conjecture through a mirror and in an enigma, not yet face to face as He is. Is it that God the Father has learned those very things which He knows, not by the body, for He has none, but by Himself, from elsewhere from some one? or has stood in need of messengers or witnesses that He might know them? Certainly not; since His own perfection enables Him to know all things that He knows. No doubt He has messengers, viz. the angels; but not to announce to Him things that He does not know, for there is nothing He does not know.

But their good lies in consulting the truth about their own works. And this it is which is meant by saying that they bring Him word of some things, not that He may learn of them, but they of Him by His word without bodily sound. They bring Him word, too, of that which He wills, being sent by Him to whomever He wills, and hearing all from Him by that word of His, i.e. finding in His truth what themselves are to do: what, to whom, and when, they are to bring word. For we too pray to Him, yet do not inform Him what our necessities are. “For your Father knows,” says His Word, “what things you have need of, before you ask Him.” Nor did He become acquainted with them, so as to know them, at any definite time; but He knew beforehand, without any beginning, all things to come in time, and among them also both what we should ask of Him, and when; and to whom He would either listen or not listen, and on what subjects.

And with respect to all His creatures, both spiritual and corporeal, He does not know them because they are, but they are because He knows them. For He was not ignorant of what He was about to create; therefore He created because He knew; He did not know because He created. Nor did He know them when created in any other way than He knew them when still to be created, for nothing accrued to His wisdom from them; but that wisdom remained as it was, while they came into existence as it was fitting and when it was fitting. So, too, it is written in the book of Ecclesiasticus: “All things are known to Him ere ever they were created: so also after they were perfected.” “So,” he says, not

otherwise; so were they known to Him, both ere ever they were created, and after they were perfected. This knowledge, therefore, is far unlike our knowledge. And the knowledge of God is itself also His wisdom, and His wisdom is itself His essence or substance. Because in the marvelous simplicity of that nature, it is not one thing to be wise and another to be, but to be wise is to be; as we have often said already also in the earlier books.

But our knowledge is in most things capable both of being lost and of being recovered, because to us to be is not the same as to know or to be wise; since it is possible for us to be, even although we know not, neither are wise in that which we have learned from elsewhere. Therefore, as our knowledge is unlike that knowledge of God, so is our word also, which is born from our knowledge, unlike that Word of God which is born from the essence of the Father. And this is as if I should say, born from the Father's knowledge, from the Father's wisdom; or still more exactly, from the Father who is knowledge, from the Father who is wisdom.

The Word of God, then, the only-begotten Son of the Father, in all things like and equal to the Father, God of God, Light of Light, Wisdom of Wisdom, Essence of Essence, is altogether that which the Father is, yet is not the Father, because the one is Son, the other is Father. And hence He knows all that the Father knows; but to Him to know, as to be, is from the Father, for to know and to be is there one. And therefore, as to be is not to the Father from the Son, so neither is to know. Accordingly, as though uttering Himself, the Father begot the Word equal to Himself in all things; for He would not have uttered Himself wholly and perfectly, if there were in His Word anything more or less than in Himself. And here that is recognized in the highest sense, "Yes, yes; no, no." And therefore this Word is truly truth, since whatever is in that knowledge from which it is born is also in itself and whatever is not in that knowledge is not in the Word.

And this Word can never have anything false, because it is unchangeable, as He is from whom it is. For "the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do." Through power He cannot do this; nor is it infirmity, but strength, by which truth cannot be false. Therefore God the Father knows all things in Himself, knows all things in the Son; but in Himself as though Himself, in the Son as though His own Word which Word is spoken concerning all those things that are in Himself. Similarly the Son knows all things, viz. in Himself, as things which are born of those which the Father knows in Himself, and in the Father, as those of which they are born, which the Son Himself knows in Himself. The Father then, and the Son know mutually; but the one by begetting, the other by being born. And each of them sees simultaneously all things that are in their knowledge, in their wisdom, in their essence: not by parts or singly, as though by alternately looking from this side to that, and from that side to this, and again from this or that object to this or that object, so as not to be able to

see some things without at the same time not seeing others; but, as I said, sees all things simultaneously, of which there is not one that He does not always see.

And that word, then, of ours which has neither sound nor thought of sound, but is of that thing in seeing which we speak inwardly, and which therefore belongs to no tongue; and hence is in some sort like, in this enigma, to that Word of God which is also God; since this too is born of our knowledge, in such manner as that also is born of the knowledge of the Father: such a word, I say, of ours, which we find to be in some way like that Word, let us not be slow to consider how unlike also it is, as it may be in our power to utter it.

Is our word, then, born of our knowledge only? Do we not say many things also that we do not know? And say them not with doubt, but thinking them to be true; while if perhaps they are true in respect to the things themselves of which we speak, they are yet not true in respect to our word, because a word is not true unless it is born of a thing that is known. In this sense, then, our word is false, not when we lie, but when we are deceived. And when we doubt, our word is not yet of the thing of which we doubt, but it is a word concerning the doubt itself. For although we do not know whether that is true of which we doubt, yet we do know that we doubt; and hence, when we say we doubt, we say a word that is true, for we say what we know. And what, too, of its being possible for us to lie? And when we do, certainly we both willingly and knowingly have a word that is false, in which there is a word that is true, viz. that we lie, for this we know.

And when we confess that we have lied, we speak that which is true; for we say what we know, for we know that we lied. But that Word which is God, and can do more than we, cannot do this. For it “can do nothing except what it sees the Father do;” and it “speaks not of itself,” but it has from the Father all that it speaks, since the Father speaks it in a special way; and the great might of that Word is that it cannot lie, because there cannot be there “yes and no,” but “yes yes, no no.” Well, but that is not even to be called a word, which is not true. I willingly assent, if so it be. What, then, if our word is true and therefore is rightly called a word? Is it the case that, as we can speak of sight of sight, and knowledge of knowledge, so we can speak of essence of essence, as that Word of God is especially spoken of, and is especially to be spoken of?

Why so? Because to us, to be is not the same as to know; since we know many things which in some sense live by memory, and so in some sense die by being forgotten: and so, when those things are no longer in our knowledge, yet we still are: and while our knowledge has slipped away and perished out of our mind, we are still alive.

In respect to those things also which are so known that they can never escape the memory, because they are present, and belong to the nature of the mind itself,—as, e.g., the knowing that we are alive (for this continues so long as the

mind continues; and because the mind continues always, this also continues always);—I say, in respect to this and to any other like instances, in which we are the rather to contemplate the image of God, it is difficult to make out in what way, although they are always known, yet because they are not always also thought of, an eternal word can be spoken respecting them, when our word is spoken in our thought. For it is eternal to the soul to live; it is eternal to know that it lives. Yet it is not eternal to it to be thinking of its own life, or to be thinking of its own knowledge of its own life; since, in entering upon this or that occupation, it will cease to think of this, although it does not cease from knowing it.

And hence it comes to pass, that if there can be in the mind any knowledge that is eternal, while the thought of that knowledge cannot be eternal, and any inner and true word of ours is only said by our thought, then God alone can be understood to have a Word that is eternal, and co-eternal with Himself. Unless, perhaps, we are to say that the very possibility of thought—since that which is known is capable of being truly thought, even at the time when it is not being thought—constitutes a word as perpetual as the knowledge itself is perpetual. But how is that a word which is not yet formed in the vision of the thought? How will it be like the knowledge of which it is born, if it has not the form of that knowledge, and is only now called a word because it can have it? For it is much as if one were to say that a word is to be so called because it can be a word. But what is this that can be a word, and is therefore already held worthy of the name of a word?

What, I say, is this thing that is formable, but not yet formed, except a something in our mind, which we toss to and fro by revolving it this way or that, while we think of first one thing and then another, according as they are found by or occur to us? And the true word then comes into being, when, as I said, that which we toss to and fro by revolving it arrives at that which we know, and is formed by that, in taking its entire likeness; so that in what manner each thing is known, in that manner also it is thought, i.e. is said in this manner in the heart, without articulate sound, without thought of articulate sound, such as no doubt belongs to some particular tongue. And hence if we even admit, in order not to dispute laboriously about a name, that this something of our mind, which can be formed from our knowledge, is to be already called a word, even before it is so formed, because it is, so to say, already formable, who would not see how great would be the unlikeness between it and that Word of God, which is so in the form of God, as not to have been formable before it was formed, or to have been capable at any time of being formless, but is a simple form, and simply equal to Him from whom it is, and with whom it is wonderfully co-eternal?

Therefore that Word of God is in such a way so called, as not to be called a thought of God, lest we believe that there is anything in God which can be

revolved, so that it at one time receives and at another recovers a form, so as to be a word, and again can lose that form and be revolved in some sense formlessly. Certainly that excellent master of speech knew well the force of words, and had looked into the nature of thought, who said in his poem, “And revolves with himself the varying issues of war,” i.e. thinks of them. That Son of God, then, is not called the Thought of God, but the Word of God. For our own thought, attaining to what we know, and formed by that, is our true word. And so the Word of God ought to be understood without any thought on the part of God, so that it be understood as the simple form itself, but containing nothing formable that can be also unformed. There are, indeed, passages of Holy Scripture that speak of God’s thoughts; but this is after the same mode of speech by which the forgetfulness of God is also there spoken of, whereas in strict propriety of language there is in Him certainly no forgetfulness.

Therefore, since we have found now in this enigma so great an unlikeness to God and the Word of God, in which yet there was found before some likeness, this, too, must be admitted, that even when we shall be like Him, when “we shall see Him as He is” (and certainly he who said this was aware beyond doubt of our present unlikeness), not even then shall we be equal to Him in nature. For that nature which is made is ever less than that which makes. And at that time our word will not indeed be false, because we shall neither lie nor be deceived. Perhaps, too, our thoughts will no longer revolve by passing and repassing from one thing to another, but we shall see all our knowledge at once, and at one glance. Still, when even this shall have come to pass, if indeed it shall come to pass, the creature which was formable will indeed have been formed, so that nothing will be wanting of that form to which it ought to attain; yet nevertheless it will not be equal to that simplicity in which there is not anything formable, which has been formed or reformed, but only form; and which being neither formless nor formed, itself is eternal and unchangeable substance.

Reading Notes

1. The selection reproduces On the Trinity XV.10–16 continuously. Section 21 continues into chapter 12, and section 22 continues into chapter 13; the historical paragraph and chapter boundaries are retained in the source record.

2. The historical translation's phrase "through a glass" is modernized as "through a mirror." The image refers to indirect vision rather than to a transparent window.

3. The Greek term logos can signify word, speech, reason, or account according to context. In these readings the traditional theological rendering Word is retained.

PART III

The Inner Life

Augustine's inward inquiry proceeds through things every reader can recognize: remembering a sound without hearing it, knowing an emotion without presently feeling it, seeking a lost object, recognizing happiness as desirable, and wondering how much of oneself remains unknown. These experiences become the material of an argument about the mind's nature and its relation to God.

The chapters begin with the extended exploration of memory in Book X of the Confessions. The narrative form has changed. Augustine is now examining the person who is making the confession, not simply recounting the events that led to conversion. The prayer therefore includes uncertainty about his present intentions and limits. Memory is at once an extraordinary capacity and a field whose breadth exceeds his grasp.

The selections from On the Trinity then develop a more formal examination of mind, knowledge, and love. Augustine seeks relations that can help human understanding approach the Trinity while remaining within the limits of analogy. He also distinguishes what the mind can doubt about its substance from what it knows through the very activity of doubting.

These writings sustain a disciplined inward attention. Their theological purpose remains integral to them. They offer a historical encounter with a thinker who treats self-examination as a way of learning both the capacities of the mind and the limits of its claim to understand itself.

CHAPTER 7

The Chambers of Memory

The movement inward begins with the visible world. Augustine questions the earth, sea, air, and heavens, and interprets their beauty as testimony to their creator. He then turns to the one who receives that testimony. Bodily sensation supplies information, but the inward person compares and judges what the senses report.

The account of memory follows from this movement. Remembered things can be present to thought while absent from the senses. Images may arrive promptly, resist recall, or crowd into attention when something else is being sought. Augustine also distinguishes images of sensible things from acquired knowledge, the relations of numbers, and the awareness of remembered emotions. The field gradually becomes more difficult: he can remember that he has forgotten, and can recognize a lost thing when it is found.

This reading consists of fourteen complete chapters from Book X. Its spatial language is deliberately vivid: fields, chambers, storehouses, hidden recesses, and rooms give form to an inquiry whose object is not itself a visible place. The images should be read as instruments of exploration. Augustine repeatedly presses beyond them when their usefulness reaches its limit.

The passage includes wonder and uncertainty as well as analysis. He knows memory through its operation while acknowledging that he cannot explain its whole power. That combination gives the chapter its distinctive force. The mind's inward abundance becomes a reason for attention and humility, and the search through memory continues to open toward the God whom Augustine seeks.

Augustine

From the Witness of the Senses to the Depths of Memory

Confessions · Book X, chapters VI–XIX

Not with uncertain, but with assured consciousness do I love You, O Lord. You have stricken my heart with Your word, and I loved You. And also the heaven, and earth, and all that is in it, look, on every side they say that I should love You; nor do they cease to speak to all, “so that they are without excuse.” But more profoundly will You have mercy on whom You will have mercy, and compassion on whom You will have compassion, otherwise do both heaven and earth tell forth Your praises to deaf ears. But what is it that I love in loving You? Not corporeal beauty, nor the splendor of time, nor the radiance of the light, so pleasant to our eyes, nor the sweet melodies of songs of all kinds, nor the fragrant smell of flowers, and ointments, and spices, not manna and honey, not

limbs pleasant to the embracements of flesh. I love not these things when I love my God; and yet I love a certain kind of light, and sound, and fragrance, and food, and embracement in loving my God, who is the light, sound, fragrance, food, and embracement of my inner man—where that light shines to my soul which no place can contain, where that sounds which time snatches not away, where there is a fragrance which no breeze disperses, where there is a food which no eating can diminish, and where that clings which no satiety can sunder.

This is what I love, when I love my God.

And what is this? I asked the earth; and it answered, “I am not He;” and whatever are in it made the same confession. I asked the sea and the deeps, and the creeping things that lived, and they replied, “We are not your God, seek higher than we.” I asked the breezy air, and the universal air with its inhabitants answered, “Anaximenes was deceived, I am not God.” I asked the heavens, the sun, moon, and stars: “Neither,” say they, “are we the God whom you seek.” And I answered to all these things which stand about the door of my flesh, “You have told me concerning my God, that you are not He; tell me something about Him.” And with a loud voice they exclaimed, “He made us.” My questioning was my observing of them; and their beauty was their reply. And I directed my thoughts to myself, and said, “Who are you?” And I answered, “A man.” And look, in me there appear both body and soul, the one without, the other within. By which of these should I seek my God, whom I had sought through the body from earth to heaven, as far as I was able to send messengers—the beams of my eyes?

But the better part is that which is inner; for to it, as both president and judge, did all these my corporeal messengers render the answers of heaven and earth and all things in it, who said, “We are not God, but He made us.” These things was my inner man cognizant of by the ministry of the outer; I, the inner man, knew all this—I, the soul, through the senses of my body. I asked the vast bulk of the earth of my God, and it answered me, “I am not He, but He made me.”

Is not this beauty visible to all whose senses are unimpaired? Why then does it not speak the same things to all? Animals, the very small and the great, see it, but they are unable to question it, because their senses are not endowed with reason to enable them to judge on what they report. But men can question it, so that “the invisible things of Him . . . are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made;” but by loving them, they are brought into subjection to them; and subjects are not able to judge. Neither do the creatures reply to such as question them, unless they can judge; nor will they alter their voice (that is, their beauty), if so be one man only sees, another both sees and questions, so as to appear one way to this man, and another to that; but appearing the same way to both, it is mute to this, it speaks to that—yes, verily, it speaks to all but they

only understand it who compare that voice received from without with the truth within.

For the truth declares to me, “Neither heaven, nor earth, nor any body is your God.” This, their nature declares to him that sees them. “They are a mass; a mass is less in part than in the whole.” Now, O my soul, you are my better part, to you I speak; for you animate the mass of your body, giving it life, which no body furnishes to a body but your God is even to you the Life of life.

What then is it that I love when I love my God? Who is He that is above the head of my soul? By my soul itself will I mount up to Him. I will soar beyond that power of mine by which I cling to the body, and fill the whole structure of it with life. Not by that power do I find my God; for then the horse and the mule, “which have no understanding,” might find Him, since it is the same power by which their bodies also live. But there is another power, not that only by which I quicken, but that also by which I endow with sense my flesh, which the Lord has made for me; bidding the eye not to hear, and the ear not to see; but that, for me to see by, and this, for me to hear by; and to each of the other senses its own proper seat and office, which being different, I, the single mind, do through them govern. I will soar also beyond this power of mine; for this the horse and mule possess, for they too discern through the body.

I will soar, then, beyond this power of my nature also, ascending by degrees to Him who made me. And I enter the fields and roomy chambers of memory, where are the treasures of countless images, imported into it from all manner of things by the senses. There is treasured up whatever likewise we think, either by enlarging or diminishing, or by varying in any way whatever those things which the sense has arrived at; yes, and whatever else has been entrusted to it and stored up, which oblivion has not yet engulfed and buried. When I am in this storehouse, I demand that what I wish should be brought forth, and some things immediately appear; others require to be longer sought after, and are dragged, as it were, out of some hidden receptacle; others, again, hurry forth in crowds, and while another thing is sought and inquired for, they leap into view, as if to say, “Is it not we, perhaps?” These I drive away with the hand of my heart from before the face of my remembrance, until what I wish be discovered making its appearance out of its secret cell.

Other things suggest themselves without effort, and in continuous order, just as they are called for,—those in front giving place to those that follow, and in giving place are treasured up again to be forthcoming when I wish it. All of which takes place when I repeat a thing from memory.

All these things, each of which entered by its own avenue, are distinctly and under general heads there laid up: as, for example, light, and all colors and forms of bodies, by the eyes; sounds of all kinds by the ears; all smells by the passage of the nostrils; all flavors by that of the mouth; and by the sensation of

the whole body is brought in what is hard or soft, hot or cold, smooth or rough, heavy or light, whether external or internal to the body. All these does that great receptacle of memory, with its many and indescribable departments, receive, to be recalled and brought forth when required; each, entering by its own door, is hid up in it. And yet the things themselves do not enter it, but only the images of the things perceived are there ready at hand for thought to recall. And who can tell how these images are formed, notwithstanding that it is evident by which of the senses each has been fetched in and treasured up? For even while I live in darkness and silence, I can bring out colors in memory if I wish, and discern between black and white, and what others I wish; nor yet do sounds break in and disturb what is drawn in by my eyes, and which I am considering, seeing that they also are there, and are concealed, laid up, as it were, apart.

For these too I can summon if I please, and immediately they appear. And though my tongue be at rest, and my throat silent, yet can I sing as much as I will; and those images of colors, which notwithstanding are there, do not interpose themselves and interrupt when another treasure is under consideration which flowed in through the ears. So the remaining things carried in and heaped up by the other senses, I recall at my pleasure. And I discern the scent of lilies from that of violets while smelling nothing; and I prefer honey to grape-syrup, a smooth thing to a rough, though then I neither taste nor handle, but only remember.

These things do I within, in that vast chamber of my memory. For there are nigh me heaven, earth, sea, and whatever I can think upon in them, besides those which I have forgotten. There also do I meet with myself, and recall myself,—what, when, or where I did a thing, and how I was affected when I did it. There are all which I remember, either by personal experience or on the faith of others. Out of the same supply do I myself with the past construct now this, now that likeness of things, which either I have experienced, or, from having experienced, have believed; and from there again future actions, events, and hopes, and upon all these again do I meditate as if they were present. “I will do this or that,” say I to myself in that vast womb of my mind, filled with the images of things so many and so great, “and this or that shall follow upon it.” “Oh that this or that might come to pass!” “God avert this or that!” Thus speak I to myself; and when I speak, the images of all I speak about are present, out of the same treasury of memory; nor could I say anything at all about them were the images absent.

Great is this power of memory, exceeding great, O my God,—an inner chamber large and boundless! Who has plumbed the depths of it? Yet it is a power of mine, and appertains to my nature; nor do I myself grasp all that I am. Therefore is the mind too narrow to contain itself. And where should that be which it does not contain of itself? Is it outside and not in itself? How is it, then,

that it does not grasp itself? A great admiration rises upon me; astonishment seizes me. And men go forth to wonder at the heights of mountains, the huge waves of the sea, the broad flow of the rivers, the extent of the ocean, and the courses of the stars, and omit to wonder at themselves; nor do they marvel that when I spoke of all these things, I was not looking on them with my eyes, and yet could not speak of them unless those mountains, and waves, and rivers, and stars which I saw, and that ocean which I believe in, I saw inwardly in my memory, and with the same vast spaces between as when I saw them abroad. But I did not by seeing appropriate them when I looked on them with my eyes; nor are the things themselves with me, but their images. And I knew by what corporeal sense each made impression on me.

And yet are not these all that the illimitable capacity of my memory retains. Here also is all that is apprehended of the liberal sciences, and not yet forgotten —removed as it were into an inner place, which is not a place; nor are they the images which are retained, but the things themselves. For what is literature, what skill in disputation, whatever I know of all the many kinds of questions there are, is so in my memory, as that I have not taken in the image and left the thing without, or that it should have sounded and passed away like a voice imprinted on the ear by that trace, by which it might be recorded, as though it sounded when it no longer did so; or as an odor while it passes away, and vanishes into wind, affects the sense of smell, from where it conveys the image of itself into the memory, which we realize in recollecting; or like food, which assuredly in the belly has now no taste, and yet has a kind of taste in the memory, or like anything that is by touching felt by the body, and which even when removed from us is imagined by the memory.

For these things themselves are not put into it, but the images of them only are caught up, with a marvelous quickness, and laid up, as it were, in most wonderful garners, and wonderfully brought forth when we remember.

But truly when I hear that there are three kinds of questions, “Whether a thing is?—what it is?—of what kind it is?” I do indeed hold fast the images of the sounds of which these words are composed, and I know that those sounds passed through the air with a noise, and now are not. But the things themselves which are signified by these sounds I never arrived at by any sense of the body, nor ever perceived them otherwise than by my mind; and in my memory have I laid up not their images, but themselves, which, how they entered into me, let them tell if they are able. For I examine all the gates of my flesh, but find not by which of them they entered. For the eyes say, “If they were colored, we announced them.” The ears say, “If they sounded, we gave notice of them.” The nostrils say, “If they smell, they passed in by us.” The sense of taste says, “If they have no flavor, ask not me.” The touch says, “If it have not body, I handled

it not, and if I never handled it, I gave no notice of it.” From where and how did these things enter into my memory?

I know not how. For when I learned them, I gave not credit to the heart of another man, but perceived them in my own; and I approved them as true, and committed them to it, laying them up, as it were, from where I might fetch them when I willed. There, then, they were, even before I learned them, but were not in my memory. Where were they, then, or therefore, when they were spoken, did I acknowledge them, and say, “So it is, it is true,” unless as being already in the memory, though so put back and concealed, as it were, in more secret caverns, that had they not been drawn forth by the advice of another I would not, perhaps, have been able to conceive of them?

Therefore we find that to learn these things, whose images we drink not in by our senses, but perceive within as they are by themselves, without images, is nothing else but by meditation as it were to concentrate, and by observing to take care that those notions which the memory did before contain scattered and confused, be laid up at hand, as it were, in that same memory, where before they lay concealed, scattered and neglected, and so the more easily present themselves to the mind well accustomed to observe them. And how many things of this sort does my memory retain which have been found out already, and, as I said, are, as it were, laid up ready to hand, which we are said to have learned and to have known; which, should we for small intervals of time cease to recall, they are again so submerged and slide back, as it were, into the more remote chambers, that they must be evolved from there again as if new (for other sphere they have none), and must be marshalled [cogenda] again that they may become known; that is to say, they must be collected [colligenda], as it were, from their dispersion; from where we have the word cogitare.

For cogo [I collect] and cogito [I recollect] have the same relation to each other as ago and agito, facio and factito. But the mind has appropriated to itself this word [cogitation], so that not that which is collected anywhere, but what is collected, that is marshalled, in the mind, is properly said to be “cogitated.”

The memory contains also the reasons and innumerable laws of numbers and dimensions, none of which has any sense of the body impressed, seeing they have neither color, nor sound, nor taste, nor smell, nor sense of touch. I have heard the sound of the words by which these things are signified when they are discussed; but the sounds are one thing, the things another. For the sounds are one thing in Greek, another in Latin; but the things themselves are neither Greek, nor Latin, nor any other language. I have seen the lines of the craftsmen, even the finest, like a spider’s web; but these are of another kind, they are not the images of those which the eye of my flesh showed me; he knows them who, without any idea whatever of a body, perceives them within himself. I have also observed the numbers of the things with which we number all the senses of the

body; but those by which we number are of another kind, nor are they the images of these, and therefore they certainly are. Let him who sees not these things mock me for saying them; and I will pity him, while he mocks me.

All these things I retain in my memory, and how I learned them I retain. I retain also many things which I have heard most falsely objected against them, which though they be false, yet is it not false that I have remembered them; and I remember, too, that I have distinguished between those truths and these falsehoods uttered against them; and I now see that it is one thing to distinguish these things, another to remember that I often distinguished them, when I often reflected upon them. I both remember, then, that I have often understood these things, and what I now distinguish and comprehend I store away in my memory, that hereafter I may remember that I understood it now. Therefore also I remember that I have remembered; so that if afterwards I shall call to mind that I have been able to remember these things, it will be through the power of memory that I shall call it to mind.

This same memory contains also the affections of my mind; not in the manner in which the mind itself contains them when it suffers them, but very differently according to a power peculiar to memory. For without being joyous, I remember myself to have had joy; and without being sad, I call to mind my past sadness; and that of which I was once afraid, I remember without fear; and without desire recall a former desire. Again, on the contrary, I at times remember when joyous my past sadness, and when sad my joy. Which is not to be wondered at as regards the body; for the mind is one thing, the body another. If I, therefore, when happy, recall some past bodily pain, it is not so strange a thing. But now, as this very memory itself is mind (for when we give orders to have a thing kept in memory, we say, “See that you bear this in mind;” and when we forget a thing, we say, “It did not enter my mind,” and, “It slipped from my mind,” thus calling the memory itself mind), as this is so, how comes it to pass that when being joyful I remember my past sorrow, the mind has joy, the memory sorrow,—the mind, from the joy than is in it, is joyful, yet the memory, from the sadness that is in it, is not sad?

Does not the memory perhaps belong to the mind? Who will say so? The memory doubtless is, so to say, the belly of the mind, and joy and sadness like sweet and bitter food, which, when entrusted to the memory, are, as it were, passed into the belly, where they can be reposited, but cannot taste. It is ridiculous to imagine these to be alike; and yet they are not utterly unlike.

But look, out of my memory I educe it, when I affirm that there be four perturbations of the mind,—desire, joy, fear, sorrow; and whatever I shall be able to dispute on these, by dividing each into its peculiar species, and by defining it, there I find what I may say, and from there I educe it; yet am I not disturbed by any of these perturbations when by remembering them I call them

to mind; and before I recollected and reviewed them, they were there; therefore by remembrance could they be brought from there. Perhaps, then, even as meat is in ruminating brought up out of the belly, so by calling to mind are these educed from the memory. Why, then, does not the disputant, thus recollecting, perceive in the mouth of his meditation the sweetness of joy or the bitterness of sorrow? Is the comparison unlike in this because not like in all points? For who would willingly discourse on these subjects, if, as often as we name sorrow or fear, we should be compelled to be sorrowful or fearful?

And yet we could never speak of them, did we not find in our memory not merely the sounds of the names, according to the images imprinted on it by the senses of the body, but the notions of the things themselves, which we never received by any door of the flesh, but which the mind itself, recognizing by the experience of its own passions, entrusted to the memory, or else which the memory itself retained without their being entrusted to it.

But whether by images or no, who can well affirm? For I name a stone, I name the sun, and the things themselves are not present to my senses, but their images are near to my memory. I name some pain of the body, yet it is not present when there is no pain; yet if its image were not in my memory, I should be ignorant what to say concerning it, nor in arguing be able to distinguish it from pleasure. I name bodily health when sound in body; the thing itself is indeed present with me, but unless its image also were in my memory, I could by no means call to mind what the sound of this name signified. Nor would sick people know, when health was named, what was said, unless the same image were retained by the power of memory, although the thing itself were absent from the body. I name numbers by which we enumerate; and not their images, but they themselves are in my memory. I name the image of the sun, and this, too, is in my memory.

For I do not recall the image of that image, but itself, for the image itself is present when I remember it. I name memory, and I know what I name. But where do I know it, except in the memory itself? Is it also present to itself by its image, and not by itself?

When I name forgetfulness, and know, too, what I name, from where should I know it if I did not remember it? I do not say the sound of the name, but the thing which it signifies which, had I forgotten, I could not know what that sound signified. When, therefore, I remember memory, then is memory present with itself, through itself. But when I remember forgetfulness, there are present both memory and forgetfulness,—memory, by which I remember, forgetfulness, which I remember. But what is forgetfulness but the privation of memory? How, then, is that present for me to remember, since, when it is so, I cannot remember? But if what we remember we retain in memory, yet, unless we remembered forgetfulness, we could never at the hearing of the name know the thing meant

by it, then is forgetfulness retained by memory. Present, therefore, it is, lest we should forget it; and being so, we do forget. Is it to be inferred from this that forgetfulness, when we remember it, is not present to the memory through itself, but through its image; because, were forgetfulness present through itself, it would not lead us to remember, but to forget? Who will now investigate this? Who shall understand how it is?

Truly, O Lord, I labor in it, and labor in myself. I am become a troublesome soil that requires overmuch labor. For we are not now searching out the tracts of heaven, or measuring the distances of the stars, or inquiring about the weight of the earth. It is I myself—I, the mind—who remember. It is not much to be wondered at, if what I myself am not be far from me. But what is nearer to me than myself? And, look, I am not able to comprehend the force of my own memory, though I cannot name myself without it. For what shall I say when it is plain to me that I remember forgetfulness? Shall I affirm that which I remember is not in my memory? Or shall I say that forgetfulness is in my memory with the view of my not forgetting? Both of these are most absurd. What third view is there? How can I assert that the image of forgetfulness is retained by my memory, and not forgetfulness itself, when I remember it? And how can I assert this, seeing that when the image of anything is imprinted on the memory, the thing itself must of necessity be present first by which that image may be imprinted?

For thus do I remember Carthage; thus, all the places to which I have been; thus, the faces of men whom I have seen, and things reported by the other senses; thus, the health or sickness of the body. For when these objects were present, my memory received images from them, which, when they were present, I might gaze on and reconsider in my mind, as I remembered them when they were absent. If, therefore, forgetfulness is retained in the memory through its image, and not through itself, then itself was once present, that its image might be taken. But when it was present, how did it write its image on the memory, seeing that forgetfulness by its presence blots out even what it finds already noted? And yet, in whatever way, though it be incomprehensible and inexplicable, yet most certain I am that I remember also forgetfulness itself, by which what we do remember is blotted out.

Great is the power of memory; very wonderful is it, O my God, a profound and infinite manifoldness; and this thing is the mind, and this I myself am. What then am I, O my God? Of what nature am I? A life various and manifold, and exceeding vast. Look, in the numberless fields, and caves, and caverns of my memory, full without number of numberless kinds of things, either through images, as all bodies are; or by the presence of the things themselves, as are the arts; or by some notion or observation, as the affections of the mind are, which, even though the mind does not suffer, the memory retains, while whatever is in

the memory is also in the mind: through all these do I run to and fro, and fly; I penetrate on this side and that, as far as I am able, and nowhere is there an end. So great is the power of memory, so great the power of life in man, whose life is mortal. What then shall I do, O You my true life, my God?

I will pass even beyond this power of mine which is called memory—I will pass beyond it, that I may proceed to You, O You sweet Light. What say You to me? Look, I am soaring by my mind towards You who remain above me. I will also pass beyond this power of mine which is called memory, wishful to reach You from where You can be reached, and to cleave to You from where it is possible to cleave to You. For even beasts and birds possess memory, else could they never find their lairs and nests again, nor many other things to which they are used; neither indeed could they become used to anything, but by their memory. I will pass, then, beyond memory also, that I may reach Him who has separated me from the four-footed beasts and the fowls of the air, making me wiser than they. I will pass beyond memory also, but where shall I find You, O You truly good and assured sweetness? But where shall I find You? If I find You without memory, then am I unmindful of You.

And how now shall I find You, if I do not remember You?

For the woman who lost her drachma, and searched for it with a lamp, unless she had remembered it, would never have found it. For when it was found, from where could she know whether it were the same, had she not remembered it? I remember to have lost and found many things; and this I know by that, that when I was searching for any of them, and was asked, “Is this it?” “Is that it?” I answered “No,” until such time as that which I sought were offered to me. Which had I not remembered,—whatever it were,—though it were offered me, yet would I not find it, because I could not recognize it. And thus it is always, when we search for and find anything that is lost. Notwithstanding, if anything be by accident lost from the sight, not from the memory,—as any visible body,—the image of it is retained within, and is searched for until it be restored to sight; and when it is found, it is recognized by the image which is within. Nor do we say that we have found what we had lost unless we recognize it; nor can we recognize it unless we remember it. But this, though lost to the sight, was retained in the memory.

But how is it when the memory itself loses anything, as it happens when we forget anything and try to recall it? Where finally do we search, but in the memory itself? And there, if perhaps one thing be offered for another, we refuse it, until we meet with what we seek; and when we do, we exclaim, “This is it!” which we should not do unless we knew it again, nor should we recognize it unless we remembered it. Assuredly, therefore, we had forgotten it. Or, had not the whole of it slipped our memory, but by the part by which we had hold was the other part sought for; since the memory perceived that it did not revolve

together as much as it was accustomed to do, and halting, as if from the mutilation of its old habit, demanded the restoration of that which was wanting. For example, if we see or think of some man known to us, and, having forgotten his name, endeavor to recover it, whatever other thing presents itself is not connected with it; because it was not used to be thought of in connection with him, and is consequently rejected, until that is present whereon the knowledge reposes fittingly as its accustomed object.

And from where, save from the memory itself, does that present itself? For even when we recognize it as put in mind of it by another, it is from there it comes. For we do not believe it as something new, but, as we recall it, admit what was said to be correct. But if it were entirely blotted out of the mind, we should not, even when put in mind of it, recollect it. For we have not as yet entirely forgotten what we remember that we have forgotten. A lost notion, then, which we have entirely forgotten, we cannot even search for.

Reading Notes

1. These passages precede the material on happiness presented in the following chapter. The anthology groups the selections by subject while preserving their source locations.

2. Augustine’s chambers and storehouses describe aspects of remembered experience. They are not presented here as anatomical descriptions of the brain.

CHAPTER 8

Knowing and Failing to Know Ourselves

Augustine's examination of himself includes a problem of testimony. Other people may hear his confession, yet they cannot directly inspect the inward life he describes. Their willingness to believe him rests partly on love. His own access to himself is also incomplete. He knows some things concerning his intentions and capacities, while other things remain concealed until experience reveals them.

The first reading contains the opening five chapters of Book X. Augustine asks what the public telling of a present inward life can accomplish. He hopes that readers will rejoice in what is good, grieve over what remains disordered, and join him in seeking healing. Confession is therefore a relationship as well as a report.

The second reading resumes after the exploration of memory presented in the preceding chapter. It asks how people recognize the happiness they seek, why joy in truth can coexist with resistance to truth, and where God is to be sought. The celebrated address to beauty appears within this extended argument. Its emotional force is joined to an examination of misdirected attention and love.

The closing passages introduce the ongoing condition of a person who has converted but still faces trial. Augustine's self-knowledge does not provide a completed inventory of a settled self. He continues to ask for strength, and his prayer makes dependence part of the account. Read as a whole, the chapter joins a searching account of inward uncertainty to the conviction that truthful examination is possible and can serve the lives of others.

Augustine

Confession, Testimony, and the Limits of Self-Knowledge

Confessions · Book X, chapters I–V

Let me know You, O You who know me; let me know You, as I am known. O You strength of my soul, enter into it, and prepare it for Yourself, that You may have and hold it without “spot or wrinkle.” This is my hope, “therefore have I spoken;” and in this hope do I rejoice, when I rejoice soberly. Other things of this life ought the less to be sorrowed for, the more they are sorrowed for; and ought the more to be sorrowed for, the less men do sorrow for them. For look, “You desire truth,” seeing that he who does it “comes to the light.” This wish I to do in confession in my heart before You, and in my writing before many witnesses.

And from You, O Lord, to whose eyes the depths of man's conscience are naked, what in me could be hidden though I were unwilling to confess to You? For so should I hide You from myself, not myself from You. But now, because my groaning witnesses that I am dissatisfied with myself, You shine forth, and satisfy, and are beloved and desired; that I may blush for myself, and renounce myself, and choose You, and may neither please You nor myself, except in You. To You, then, O Lord, am I manifest, whatever I am, and with what fruit I may confess to You I have spoken. Nor do I it with words and sounds of the flesh, but with the words of the soul, and that cry of reflection which Your ear knows. For when I am wicked, to confess to You is nothing but to be dissatisfied with myself; but when I am truly devout, it is nothing but not to attribute it to myself, because You, O Lord, do "bless the righteous;" but first You justify him "ungodly." My confession, therefore, O my God, in Your sight, is made to You silently, and yet not silently.

For in noise it is silent, in affection it cries aloud. For neither do I give utterance to anything that is right to men which You have not heard from me before, nor do You hear anything of the kind from me which Yourself said not first to me.

What then have I to do with men, that they should hear my confessions, as if they were going to cure all my diseases? A people curious to know the lives of others, but slow to correct their own. Why do they desire to hear from me what I am, who are unwilling to hear from You what they are? And how can they tell, when they hear from me of myself, whether I speak the truth, seeing that no man knows what is in man, "save the spirit of man which is in him "? But if they hear from You anything concerning themselves, they will not be able to say, "The Lord lies." For what is it to hear from You of themselves, but to know themselves? And who is he that knows himself and says, "It is false," unless he himself lies? But because "love believes all things" (among those at all events whom by union with itself it makes one), I too, O Lord, also so confess to You that men may hear, to whom I cannot prove whether I confess the truth, yet do they believe me whose ears love opens to me.

But yet do You, my most secret Physician, make clear to me what fruit I may reap by doing it. For the confessions of my past sins,—which You have "forgiven" and "covered," that You might make me happy in You, changing my soul by faith and Your sacrament,—when they are read and heard, stir up the heart, that it sleep not in despair and say, "I cannot;" but that it may awake in the love of Your mercy and the sweetness of Your grace, by which he that is weak is strong, if by it he is made conscious of his own weakness. As for the good, they take delight in hearing of the past errors of such as are now freed from them; and they delight, not because they are errors, but because they have been and are so no longer. For what fruit, then, O Lord my God, to whom my conscience makes her

daily confession, more confident in the hope of Your mercy than in her own innocency,—for what fruit, I beseech You, do I confess even to men in Your presence by this book what I am at this time, not what I have been?

For that fruit I have both seen and spoken of, but what I am at this time, at the very moment of making my confessions, divers people desire to know, both who knew me and who knew me not,—who have heard of or from me,—but their ear is not at my heart, where I am whatever I am. They are desirous, then, of hearing me confess what I am within, where they can neither stretch eye, nor ear, nor mind; they desire it as those willing to believe,—but will they understand? For love, by which they are good, says to them that I do not lie in my confessions, and she in them believes me.

But for what fruit do they desire this? Do they wish me happiness when they learn how near, by Your gift, I come to You; and to pray for me, when they learn how much I am kept back by my own weight? To such will I declare myself. For it is no small fruit, O Lord my God, that by many thanks should be given to You on our behalf, and that by many You should be entreated for us. Let the fraternal soul love that in me which You teach should be loved, and lament that in me which You teach should be lamented. Let a fraternal and not an alien soul do this, nor that “of strange children, whose mouth speaks vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood,” but that fraternal one which, when it approves me, rejoices for me, but when it disapproves me, is sorry for me; because whether it approves or disapproves it loves me. To such will I declare myself; let them breathe freely at my good deeds, and sigh over my evil ones.

My good deeds are Your institutions and Your gifts, my evil ones are my delinquencies and Your judgments. Let them breathe freely at the one, and sigh over the other; and let hymns and tears ascend into Your sight out of the fraternal hearts—Your censers. And do You, O Lord, who take delight in the incense of Your holy temple, have mercy upon me according to Your great mercy, “for Your name’s sake;” and on no account leaving what You have begun in me, do You complete what is imperfect in me.

This is the fruit of my confessions, not of what I was, but of what I am, that I may confess this not before You only, in a secret exultation with trembling, and a secret sorrow with hope, but in the ears also of the believing sons of men,—partakers of my joy, and sharers of my mortality, my fellow-citizens and the companions of my pilgrimage, those who are gone before, and those that are to follow after, and the comrades of my way. These are Your servants, my brothers, those whom You wish to be Your sons; my masters, whom You have commanded me to serve, if I desire to live with and of You. But this Your word were little to me did it command in speaking, without going before in acting. This then do I both in deed and word, this I do under Your wings, in too great danger, were it not that my soul, under Your wings, is subject to You, and my weakness known

to You. I am a little one, but my Father lives for ever, and my Defender is “sufficient” for me.

For He is the same who begot me and who defends me; and You Yourself are all my good; even You, the Omnipotent, who are with me, and that before I am with You. To such, therefore, whom You command me to serve will I declare, not what I was, but what I now am, and what I still am. But neither do I judge myself. Thus then I would be heard.

For it is You, Lord, that judge me; for although no “man knows the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him,” yet is there something of man which “the spirit of man which is in him” itself knows not. But You, Lord, who have made him, know him wholly. I indeed, though in Your sight I despise myself, and reckon “myself but dust and ashes,” yet know something concerning You, which I know not concerning myself. And assuredly “now we see through a glass darkly,” not yet “face to face.” So long, therefore, as I be “absent” from You, I am more “present” with myself than with You; and yet know I that You can not suffer violence; but for myself I know not what temptations I am able to resist, and what I am not able. But there is hope, because You are faithful, who will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it.

I would therefore confess what I know concerning myself; I will confess also what I know not concerning myself. And because what I do know of myself, I know by You enlightening me; and what I know not of myself, so long I know not until the time when my “darkness be as the noonday” in Your sight.

Happiness, Truth, and the Search for God

Confessions · Book X, chapters XX–XXIX

How, then, do I seek You, O Lord? For when I seek You, my God, I seek a happy life. I will seek You, that my soul may live. For my body lives by my soul, and my soul lives by You. How, then, do I seek a happy life, seeing that it is not mine till I can say, “It is enough!” in that place where I ought to say it? How do I seek it? Is it by remembrance, as though I had forgotten it, knowing too that I had forgotten it? or, longing to learn it as a thing unknown, which either I had never known, or had so forgotten it as not even to remember that I had forgotten it? Is not a happy life the thing that all desire, and is there any one who altogether desires it not? But where did they acquire the knowledge of it, that they so desire it? Where have they seen it, that they so love it? Truly we have it, but how I know not. Yes, there is another way in which, when any one has it, he is happy; and some there be that are happy in hope.

These have it in an inferior kind to those that are happy in fact; and yet are they better off than they who are happy neither in fact nor in hope. And even

these, had they it not in some way, would not so much desire to be happy, which that they do desire is most certain. How they come to know it, I cannot tell, but they have it by some kind of knowledge unknown to me, who am in much doubt as to whether it be in the memory; for if it be there, then have we been happy once; whether all individually, or as in that man who first sinned, in whom also we all died, and from whom we are all born with misery, I do not now ask; but I ask whether the happy life be in the memory? For did we not know it, we should not love it. We hear the name, and we all acknowledge that we desire the thing; for we are not delighted with the sound only. For when a Greek hears it spoken in Latin, he does not feel delighted, for he knows not what is spoken; but we are delighted, as he too would be if he heard it in Greek; because the thing itself is neither Greek nor Latin, which Greeks and Latins, and men of all other tongues, long so earnestly to obtain.

It is then known to all, and could they with one voice be asked whether they wished to be happy, without doubt they would all answer that they would. And this could not be unless the thing itself, of which it is the name, were retained in their memory.

But is it so as one who has seen Carthage remembers it? No. For a happy life is not visible to the eye, because it is not a body. Is it, then, as we remember numbers? No. For he that has these in his knowledge strives not to attain further; but a happy life we have in our knowledge, and, therefore, do we love it, while yet we wish further to attain it that we may be happy. Is it, then, as we remember eloquence? No. For although some, when they hear this name, call the thing to mind, who, indeed, are not yet eloquent, and many who wish to be so, from where it appears to be in their knowledge; yet have these by their bodily perceptions noticed that others are eloquent, and been delighted with it, and long to be so,—although they would not be delighted save for some interior knowledge, nor desire to be so unless they were delighted,—but a happy life we can by no bodily perception make experience of in others. Is it, then, as we remember joy?

It may be so; for my joy I remember, even when sad, like as I do a happy life when I am miserable. Nor did I ever with perception of the body either see, hear, smell, taste, or touch my joy; but I experienced it in my mind when I rejoiced; and the knowledge of it clung to my memory, so that I can call it to mind sometimes with disdain and at others with desire, according to the difference of the things in which I now remember that I rejoiced. For even from unclean things have I been bathed with a certain joy, which now calling to mind, I detest and execrate; at other times, from good and honest things, which, with longing, I call to mind, though perhaps they are not near at hand, and then with sadness do I call to mind a former joy.

Where and when, then, did I experience my happy life, that I should call it to mind, and love and long for it? Nor is it I alone or a few others who wish to be happy, but truly all; which, unless by certain knowledge we knew, we should not wish with so certain a will. But how is this, that if two men be asked whether they would wish to serve as soldiers one, it may be, would reply that he would, the other that he would not; but if they were asked whether they would wish to be happy, both of them would unhesitatingly say that they would; and this one would wish to serve, and the other not, from no other motive but to be happy? Is it, perhaps, that as one joys in this, and another in that, so do all men agree in their wish for happiness, as they would agree, were they asked, in wishing to have joy,—and this joy they call a happy life? Although, then, one pursues joy in this way, and another in that, all have one goal, which they strive to attain, namely, to have joy. This life, being a thing which no one can say he has not experienced, it is on that account found in the memory, and recognized whenever the name of a happy life is heard.

Let it be far, O Lord,—let it be far from the heart of Your servant who confesses to You; let it be far from me to think myself happy, be the joy what it may. For there is a joy which is not granted to the “wicked,” but to those who worship You thankfully, whose joy You Yourself are. And the happy life is this,—to rejoice to You, in You, and for You; this it is, and there is no other. But those who think there is another follow after another joy, and that not the true one. Their will, however, is not turned away from some shadow of joy.

It is not, then, certain that all men wish to be happy, since those who wish not to rejoice in You, which is the only happy life, do not verily desire the happy life. Or do all desire this, but because “the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh,” so that they “cannot do the things that they would,” they fall upon that which they are able to do, and with that are content; because that which they are not able to do, they do not so will as to make them able? For I ask of every man, whether he would rather rejoice in truth or in falsehood. They will no more hesitate to say, “in truth,” than to say, “that they wish to be happy.” For a happy life is joy in the truth. For this is joy in You, who are “the truth,” O God, “my light,” “the health of my countenance, and my God.” All wish for this happy life; this life do all wish for, which is the only happy one; joy in the truth do all wish for.

I have had experience of many who wished to deceive, but not one who wished to be deceived. Where, then, did they know this happy life, save where they knew also the truth? For they love it, too, since they would not be deceived. And when they love a happy life, which is nothing else but joy in the truth, assuredly they love also the truth; which yet they would not love were there not some knowledge of it in the memory. Therefore, then, do they not rejoice in it? Why are they not happy? Because they are more entirely occupied with other

things which rather make them miserable, than that which would make them happy, which they remember so little of. For there is yet a little light in men; let them walk—let them "walk," that the "darkness" seize them not.

Why, then, does truth beget hatred and that man of yours, preaching the truth become an enemy to them, whereas a happy life is loved, which is nothing else but joy in the truth; unless that truth is loved in such a sort as that those who love anything else wish that to be the truth which they love, and, as they are willing to be deceived, are unwilling to be convinced that they are so? Therefore do they hate the truth for the sake of that thing which they love instead of the truth. They love truth when she shines on them, and hate her when she rebukes them. For, because they are not willing to be deceived, and wish to deceive, they love her when she reveals herself, and hate her when she reveals them. On that account shall she so requite them, that those who were unwilling to be discovered by her she both discovers against their will, and discovers not herself to them. Thus, thus, truly thus does the human mind, so blind and sick, so base and unseemly, desire to lie concealed, but wishes not that anything should be concealed from it.

But the opposite is rendered to it,—that itself is not concealed from the truth, but the truth is concealed from it. Yet, even while thus wretched, it prefers to rejoice in truth rather than in falsehood. Happy then will it be, when, no trouble intervening, it shall rejoice in that only truth by whom all things else are true.

Look how I have enlarged in my memory seeking You, O Lord; and out of it have I not found You. Nor have I found anything concerning You, but what I have retained in memory from the time I learned You. For from the time I learned You have I never forgotten You. For where I found truth, there found I my God, who is the Truth itself, which from the time I learned it have I not forgotten. And thus since the time I learned You, You abide in my memory; and there do I find You whensoever I call You to remembrance, and delight in You. These are my holy delights, which You have bestowed upon me in Your mercy, having respect to my poverty.

But where in my memory abide You, O Lord, where do You there abide? What manner of chamber have You there formed for Yourself? What sort of sanctuary have You erected for Yourself? You have granted this honor to my memory, to take up Your abode in it; but in what quarter of it You abide, I am considering. For in calling You to mind, I soared beyond those parts of it which the beasts also possess, since I found You not there among the images of corporeal things; and I arrived at those parts where I had committed the affections of my mind, nor there did I find You. And I entered into the very seat of my mind, which it has in my memory, since the mind remembers itself also—nor were You there. For as You are not a bodily image, nor the affection of a living creature, as when we rejoice, condole, desire, fear, remember, forget, or anything of the kind; so

neither are You the mind itself, because You are the Lord God of the mind; and all these things are changed, but You remain unchangeable over all, yet grant to dwell in my memory, from the time I learned You.

But why do I now seek in what part of it You dwell, as if truly there were places in it? You do dwell in it assuredly, since I have remembered You from the time I learned You, and I find You in it when I call You to mind.

Where, then, did I find You, so as to be able to learn You? For You were not in my memory before I learned You. Where, then, did I find You, so as to be able to learn You, but in You above me? Place there is none; we go both “backward” and “forward,” and there is no place. Everywhere, O Truth, do You direct all who consult You, and do at once answer all, though they consult You on divers things. Clearly do You answer, though all do not with clearness hear. All consult You upon whatever they wish, though they hear not always that which they wish. He is Your best servant who does not so much look to hear that from You which he himself wishes, as to wish that which he hears from You.

Too late did I love You, O Fairness, so ancient, and yet so new! Too late did I love You! For look, You were within, and I without, and there did I seek You; I, unlovely, rushed heedlessly among the things of beauty You made. You were with me, but I was not with You. Those things kept me far from You, which, unless they were in You, were not. You called, and cried aloud, and forced open my deafness. You did gleam and shine, and chase away my blindness. You did exhale odors, and I drew in my breath and do pant after You. I tasted, and do hunger and thirst. You did touch me, and I burned for Your peace.

When I shall cleave to You with all my being, then shall I in nothing have pain and labor; and my life shall be a real life, being wholly full of You. But now since he whom You fill is the one You lift up, I am a burden to myself, as not being full of You. Joys of sorrow contend with sorrows of joy; and on which side the victory may be I know not. Woe is me! Lord, have pity on me. My evil sorrows contend with my good joys; and on which side the victory may be I know not. Woe is me! Lord, have pity on me. Woe is me! Look, I hide not my wounds; You are the Physician, I the sick; You merciful, I miserable. Is not the life of man upon earth a temptation? Who is he that wishes for vexations and difficulties? You command them to be endured, not to be loved. For no man loves what he endures, though he may love to endure. For notwithstanding he rejoices to endure, he would rather there were nothing for him to endure.

In adversity, I desire prosperity; in prosperity, I fear adversity. What middle place, then, is there between these, where human life is not a temptation? Woe to the prosperity of this world, once and again, from fear of misfortune and a corruption of joy! Woe to the adversities of this world, once and again, and for the third time, from the desire of prosperity; and because adversity itself is a

hard thing, and makes shipwreck of endurance! Is not the life of man upon earth a temptation, and that without intermission?

And my whole hope is only in Your exceeding great mercy. Give what You command, and command what You will. You impose continency upon us, “nevertheless, when I perceived,” says one, “that I could not otherwise obtain her, except God gave her me; . . . that was a point of wisdom also to know whose gift she was.” For by continency are we bound up and brought into one, from where we were scattered abroad into many. For he loves You too little who loves anything with You, which he loves not for You, O love, who ever burn, and are never quenched! O love, my God, kindle me! You command continency; give what You command, and command what You will.

Reading Notes

1. Confessions X.6–19, between these two selections, appears in the preceding chapter of this reader.

2. The phrase “give what you command, and command what you will” belongs to Augustine’s prayer about grace. Its argument receives fuller treatment in Part V.

CHAPTER 9

Mind, Knowledge, and Love

The selections from On the Trinity change the pace of the inquiry. Augustine begins by defining the search as an activity conducted within faith and with a readiness to be corrected. He then considers the mind that knows itself and the love by which it is directed toward that knowledge. The relations among these three become material for a theological analogy.

The first reading comprises the opening four chapters of Book IX. Augustine asks how mind, knowledge, and love may be distinguished without being separated, and how a relation can be present within the same spiritual life. His examples include the difference between bodily things and the mind's knowledge of itself. The discussion requires attention to the changing senses in which terms such as whole, part, substance, and relation are used.

The second reading comes from the final three chapters of Book X. It begins with the mind's effort to know itself and the images through which it may mistakenly identify itself with a bodily substance. Augustine argues that uncertainty about such explanations does not remove the immediate awareness of living, remembering, understanding, willing, thinking, knowing, and judging. He then develops the relations among memory, understanding, and will.

The two sequences are separated in the original by a longer investigation. Their locations are given so the reader can recover that investigation. Together they show how Augustine uses inward experience to distinguish acts of the mind and to examine their unity, while keeping the theological purpose of the comparison in view.

Augustine

The Mind That Knows and Loves Itself

On the Trinity · Book IX, chapters I–IV

We certainly seek a trinity,—not any trinity, but that Trinity which is God, and the true and supreme and only God. Let my hearers then wait, for we are still seeking. And no one justly finds fault with such a search, if at least he who seeks that which either to know or to utter is most difficult, is steadfast in the faith. But whoever either sees or teaches better, finds fault quickly and justly with any one who confidently affirms concerning it. “Seek God,” he says, “and your heart shall live;” and lest any one should rashly rejoice that he has, as it were, apprehended it, “Seek,” he says, “His face evermore.” And the apostle: “If any man,” he says, “think that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought

to know. But if any man love God, the same is known of Him." He has not said, has known Him, which is dangerous presumption, but "is known of Him." So also in another place, when he had said, "But now after that you have known God:" immediately correcting himself, he says, "or rather are known of God." And above all in that other place, "Brothers," he says, "I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press in purpose toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded." Perfection in this life, he tells us, is nothing else than to forget those things which are behind, and to reach forth and press in purpose toward those things which are before. For he that seeks has the safest purpose, [who seeks] until that is taken hold of to where we are tending, and for which we are reaching forth. But that is the right purpose which starts from faith. For a certain faith is in some way the starting-point of knowledge; but a certain knowledge will not be made perfect, except after this life, when we shall see face to face. Let us therefore be thus minded, so as to know that the disposition to seek the truth is more safe than that which presumes things unknown to be known. Let us therefore so seek as if we should find, and so find as if we were about to seek. For "when a man has done, then he begins." Let us doubt without unbelief of things to be believed; let us affirm without rashness of things to be understood: authority must be held fast in the former, truth sought out in the latter.

As regards this question, then, let us believe that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit is one God, the Creator and Ruler of the whole creature; and that the Father is not the Son, nor the Holy Spirit either the Father or the Son, but a trinity of persons mutually interrelated, and a unity of an equal essence. And let us seek to understand this, praying for help from Himself, whom we wish to understand; and as much as He grants, desiring to explain what we understand with so much pious care and anxiety, that even if in any case we say one thing for another, we may at least say nothing unworthy. As, for the sake of example, if we say anything concerning the Father that does not properly belong to the Father, or does belong to the Son, or to the Holy Spirit, or to the Trinity itself; and if anything of the Son which does not properly suit with the Son, or at all events which does suit with the Father, or with the Holy Spirit, or with the Trinity; or if, again, anything concerning the Holy Spirit, which is not fitly a property of the Holy Spirit, yet is not alien from the Father, or from the Son, or from the one God the Trinity itself.

Even as now our wish is to see whether the Holy Spirit is properly that love which is most excellent which if He is not, either the Father is love, or the Son, or the Trinity itself; since we cannot withstand the most certain faith and weighty authority of Scripture, saying, "God is love." And yet we ought not to

deviate into profane error, so as to say anything of the Trinity which does not suit the Creator, but rather the creature, or which is feigned outright by mere empty thought.

And this being so, let us direct our attention to those three things which we fancy we have found. We are not yet speaking of heavenly things, nor yet of God the Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit, but of that inadequate image, which yet is an image, that is, man; for our feeble mind perhaps can gaze upon this more familiarly and more easily. Well then, when I, who make this inquiry, love anything, there are three things concerned—myself, and that which I love, and love itself. For I do not love love, except I love a lover; for there is no love where nothing is loved. Therefore there are three things—he who loves, and that which is loved, and love. But what if I love none except myself? Will there not then be two things—that which I love, and love? For he who loves and that which is loved are the same when any one loves himself; just as to love and to be loved, in the same way, is the very same thing when any one loves himself.

Since the same thing is said, when it is said, he loves himself, and he is loved by himself. For in that case to love and to be loved are not two different things: just as he who loves and he who is loved are not two different persons. But yet, even so, love and what is loved are still two things. For there is no love when any one loves himself, except when love itself is loved. But it is one thing to love one's self, another to love one's own love. For love is not loved, unless as already loving something; since where nothing is loved there is no love. Therefore there are two things when any one loves himself—love, and that which is loved. For then he that loves and that which is loved are one. From where it seems that it does not follow that three things are to be understood wherever love is. For let us put aside from the inquiry all the other many things of which a man consists; and in order that we may discover clearly what we are now seeking, as far as in such a subject is possible, let us treat of the mind alone.

The mind, then, when it loves itself, discloses two things—mind and love. But what is to love one's self, except to wish to help one's self to the enjoyment of self? And when any one wishes himself to be just as much as he is, then the will is on a par with the mind, and the love is equal to him who loves. And if love is a substance, it is certainly not body, but spirit; and the mind also is not body, but spirit. Yet love and mind are not two spirits, but one spirit; nor yet two essences, but one: and yet here are two things that are one, he that loves and love; or, if you like so to put it, that which is loved and love. And these two, indeed, are mutually said relatively. Since he who loves is referred to love, and love to him who loves. For he who loves, loves with some love, and love is the love of some one who loves. But mind and spirit are not said relatively, but express essence.

For mind and spirit do not exist because the mind and spirit of some particular man exists. For if we subtract the body from that which is man, which

is so called with the conjunction of body, the mind and spirit remain. But if we subtract him that loves, then there is no love; and if we subtract love, then there is no one that loves. And therefore, in so far as they are mutually referred to one another, they are two; but whereas they are spoken in respect to themselves, each are spirit, and both together also are one spirit; and each are mind, and both together one mind. Where, then, is the trinity? Let us attend as much as we can, and let us invoke the everlasting light, that He may illuminate our darkness, and that we may see in ourselves, as much as we are permitted, the image of God.

For the mind cannot love itself, except also it know itself; for how can it love what it does not know? Or if any body says that the mind, from either general or special knowledge, believes itself of such a character as it has by experience found others to be and therefore loves itself, he speaks most foolishly. For from where does a mind know another mind, if it does not know itself? For the mind does not know other minds and not know itself, as the eye of the body sees other eyes and does not see itself; for we see bodies through the eyes of the body, because, unless we are looking into a mirror, we cannot refract and reflect the rays into themselves which shine forth through those eyes, and touch whatever we discern,—a subject, indeed, which is treated of most subtlely and obscurely, until it be clearly demonstrated whether the fact be so, or whether it be not. But whatever is the nature of the power by which we discern through the eyes, certainly, whether it be rays or anything else, we cannot discern with the eyes that power itself; but we inquire into it with the mind, and if possible, understand even this with the mind.

As the mind, then, itself gathers the knowledge of corporeal things through the senses of the body, so of incorporeal things through itself. Therefore it knows itself also through itself, since it is incorporeal; for if it does not know itself, it does not love itself.

But as there are two things (duo quaedam), the mind and the love of it, when it loves itself; so there are two things, the mind and the knowledge of it, when it knows itself. Therefore the mind itself, and the love of it, and the knowledge of it, are three things (tria quaedam), and these three are one; and when they are perfect they are equal. For if one loves himself less than as he is,—as for example, suppose that the mind of a man only loves itself as much as the body of a man ought to be loved, whereas the mind is more than the body,—then it is in fault, and its love is not perfect. Again, if it loves itself more than as it is,—as if, for instance, it loves itself as much as God is to be loved, whereas the mind is incomparably less than God,—here also it is exceedingly in fault, and its love of self is not perfect. But it is in fault more perversely and wrongly still, when it loves the body as much as God is to be loved.

Also, if knowledge is less than that thing which is known, and which can be fully known, then knowledge is not perfect; but if it is greater, then the nature which knows is above that which is known, as the knowledge of the body is greater than the body itself, which is known by that knowledge. For knowledge is a kind of life in the reason of the knower, but the body is not life; and any life is greater than any body, not in bulk, but in power. But when the mind knows itself, its own knowledge does not rise above itself, because itself knows, and itself is known. When, therefore, it knows itself entirely, and no other thing with itself, then its knowledge is equal to itself; because its knowledge is not from another nature, since it knows itself. And when it perceives itself entirely, and nothing more, then it is neither less nor greater. We said therefore rightly, that these three things, [mind, love, and knowledge], when they are perfect, are by consequence equal.

Similar reasoning suggests to us, if indeed we can any way understand the matter, that these things [i.e. love and knowledge] exist in the soul, and that, being as it were involved in it, they are so evolved from it as to be perceived and reckoned up substantially, or, so to say, essentially. Not as though in a subject; as color, or shape, or any other quality or quantity, are in the body. For anything of this [material] kind does not go beyond the subject in which it is; for the color or shape of this particular body cannot be also those of another body. But the mind can also love something besides itself, with that love with which it loves itself. And further, the mind does not know itself only, but also many other things. Therefore love and knowledge are not contained in the mind as in a subject, but these also exist substantially, as the mind itself does; because, even if they are mutually predicated relatively, yet they exist each severally in their own substance. Nor are they so mutually predicated relatively as color and the colored subject are; so that color is in the colored subject, but has not any proper substance in itself, since colored body is a substance, but color is in a substance; but as two friends are also two men, which are substances, while they are said to be men not relatively, but friends relatively.

But, further, although one who loves or one who knows is a substance, and knowledge is a substance, and love is a substance, but he that loves and love, or, he that knows and knowledge, are spoken of relatively to each other, as are friends: yet mind or spirit are not relatives, as neither are men relatives: nevertheless he that loves and love, or he that knows and knowledge, cannot exist separately from each other, as men can that are friends. Although it would seem that friends, too, can be separated in body, not in mind, in as far as they are friends: no, it can even happen that a friend may even also begin to hate a friend and on this account cease to be a friend while the other does not know it, and still loves him. But if the love with which the mind loves itself ceases to be, then the mind also will at the same time cease to love. Likewise, if the

knowledge by which the mind knows itself ceases to be, then the mind will also at the same time cease to know itself.

Just as the head of anything that has a head is certainly a head, and they are predicated relatively to each other, although they are also substances: for both a head is a body, and so is that which has a head; and if there be no head, then neither will there be that which has a head. Only these things can be separated from each other by cutting off, those cannot.

And even if there are some bodies which cannot be wholly separated and divided, yet they would not be bodies unless they consisted of their own proper parts. A part then is predicated relatively to a whole, since every part is a part of some whole, and a whole is a whole by having all its parts. But since both part and whole are bodies, these things are not only predicated relatively, but exist also substantially. Perhaps, then, the mind is a whole, and the love with which it loves itself, and the knowledge with which it knows itself, are as it were its parts, of which two parts that whole consists. Or are there three equal parts which make up the one whole? But no part embraces the whole, of which it is a part; whereas, when the mind knows itself as a whole, that is, knows itself perfectly, then the knowledge of it extends through the whole of it; and when it loves itself perfectly, then it loves itself as a whole, and the love of it extends through the whole of it.

Is it, then, as one drink is made from wine and water and honey, and each single part extends through the whole, and yet they are three things (for there is no part of the drink which does not contain these three things; for they are not joined as if they were water and oil, but are entirely commingled: and they are all substances, and the whole of that liquor which is composed of the three is one substance),—is it, I say, in some such way as this we are to think these three to be together, mind, love, and knowledge? But water, wine, and honey are not of one substance, although one substance results in the drink made from the commingling of them. And I cannot see how those other three are not of the same substance, since the mind itself loves itself, and itself knows itself; and these three so exist, as that the mind is neither loved nor known by any other thing at all. These three, therefore, must needs be of one and the same essence; and for that reason, if they were confounded together as it were by a commingling, they could not be in any way three, neither could they be mutually referred to each other.

Just as if you were to make from one and the same gold three similar rings, although connected with each other, they are mutually referred to each other, because they are similar. For everything similar is similar to something, and there is a trinity of rings, and one gold. But if they are blended with each other, and each mingled with the other through the whole of their own bulk, then that trinity will fall through, and it will not exist at all; and not only will it be called

one gold, as it was called in the case of those three rings, but now it will not be called three things of gold at all.

Certainty, Memory, Understanding, and Will

On the Trinity · Book X, chapters X–XII

Let it not then add anything to that which it knows itself to be, when it is bidden to know itself. For it knows, at any rate, that this is said to itself; namely, to the self that is, and that lives, and that understands. But a dead body also is, and cattle live; but neither a dead body nor cattle understand. Therefore it so knows that it so is, and that it so lives, as an understanding is and lives. When, therefore, for example’s sake, the mind thinks itself air, it thinks that air understands; it knows, however, that itself understands, but it does not know itself to be air, but only thinks so. Let it separate that which it thinks itself; let it discern that which it knows; let this remain to it, about which not even have they doubted who have thought the mind to be this corporeal thing or that. For certainly every mind does not consider itself to be air; but some think themselves fire, others the brain, and some one kind of corporeal thing, others another, as I have mentioned before; yet all know that they themselves understand, and are, and live; but they refer understanding to that which they understand, but to be, and to live, to themselves.

And no one doubts, either that no one understands who does not live, or that no one lives of whom it is not true that he is; and that therefore by consequence that which understands both is and lives; not as a dead body is which does not live, nor as a soul lives which does not understand, but in some proper and more excellent manner. Further, they know that they will, and they equally know that no one can will who is not and who does not live; and they also refer that will itself to something which they will with that will. They know also that they remember; and they know at the same time that nobody could remember, unless he both was and lived; but we refer memory itself also to something, in that we remember those things. Therefore the knowledge and science of many things are contained in two of these three, memory and understanding; but will must be present, that we may enjoy or use them. For we enjoy things known, in which things themselves the will finds delight for their own sake, and so reposes; but we use those things, which we refer to some other thing which we are to enjoy.

Neither is the life of man vicious and culpable in any other way, than as wrongly using and wrongly enjoying. But it is no place here to discuss this.

But since we treat of the nature of the mind, let us remove from our consideration all knowledge which is received from without, through the senses of the body; and attend more carefully to the position which we have laid down, that all minds know and are certain concerning themselves. For men certainly have doubted whether the power of living, of remembering, of understanding, of

willing, of thinking, of knowing, of judging, be of air, or of fire, or of the brain, or of the blood, or of atoms, or besides the usual four elements of a fifth kind of body, I know not what; or whether the combining or tempering together of this our flesh itself has power to accomplish these things. And one has attempted to establish this, and another to establish that. Yet who ever doubts that he himself lives, and remembers, and understands, and wills, and thinks, and knows, and judges? Seeing that even if he doubts, he lives; if he doubts, he remembers why he doubts; if he doubts, he understands that he doubts; if he doubts, he wishes to be certain; if he doubts, he thinks; if he doubts, he knows that he does not know; if he doubts, he judges that he ought not to assent rashly.

Whoever therefore doubts about anything else, ought not to doubt of all these things; which if they were not, he would not be able to doubt of anything.

They who think the mind to be either a body or the combination or tempering of the body, will have all these things to seem to be in a subject, so that the substance is air, or fire, or some other corporeal thing, which they think to be the mind; but that the understanding (intelligentia) is in this corporeal thing as its quality, so that this corporeal thing is the subject, but the understanding is in the subject: viz. that the mind is the subject, which they judge to be a corporeal thing, but the understanding [intelligence], or any other of those things which we have mentioned as certain to us, is in that subject. They also hold nearly the same opinion who deny the mind itself to be body, but think it to be the combination or tempering together of the body; for there is this difference, that the former say that the mind itself is the substance, in which the understanding [intelligence] is, as in a subject; but the latter say that the mind itself is in a subject, viz. in the body, of which it is the combination or tempering together. And hence, by consequence, what else can they think, except that the understanding also is in the same body as in a subject?

And all these do not perceive that the mind knows itself, even when it seeks for itself, as we have already shown. But nothing is at all rightly said to be known while its substance is not known. And therefore, when the mind knows itself, it knows its own substance; and when it is certain about itself, it is certain about its own substance. But it is certain about itself, as those things which are said above prove convincingly; although it is not at all certain whether itself is air, or fire, or some body, or some function of body. Therefore it is not any of these. And to that whole which is bidden to know itself, belongs this, that it is certain that it is not any of those things of which it is uncertain, and is certain that it is that only, which only it is certain that it is. For it thinks in this way of fire, or air, and whatever else of the body it thinks of. Neither can it in any way be brought to pass that it should so think that which itself is, as it thinks that which itself is not.

Since it thinks all these things through an imaginary phantasy, whether fire, or air, or this or that body, or that part or combination and tempering together of the body: nor assuredly is it said to be all those things, but some one of them. But if it were any one of them, it would think this one in a different manner from the rest viz. not through an imaginary phantasy, as absent things are thought, which either themselves or some of like kind have been touched by the bodily sense; but by some inward, not feigned, but true presence (for nothing is more present to it than itself); just as it thinks that itself lives, and remembers, and understands, and wills. For it knows these things in itself, and does not imagine them as though it had touched them by the sense outside itself, as corporeal things are touched. And if it attaches nothing to itself from the thought of these things, so as to think itself to be something of the kind, then whatever remains to it from itself that alone is itself.

Putting aside, then, for a little while all other things, of which the mind is certain concerning itself, let us especially consider and discuss these three—memory, understanding, will. For we may commonly discern in these three the character of the abilities of the young also; since the more tenaciously and easily a boy remembers, and the more acutely he understands, and the more ardently he studies, the more praiseworthy is he in point of ability. But when the question is about any one's learning, then we ask not how solidly and easily he remembers, or how shrewdly he understands; but what it is that he remembers, and what it is that he understands. And because the mind is regarded as praiseworthy, not only as being learned, but also as being good, one gives heed not only to what he remembers and what he understands, but also to what he wills (velit); not how ardently he wills, but first what it is he wills, and then how greatly he wills it. For the mind that loves eagerly is then to be praised, when it loves that which ought to be loved eagerly.

Since, then, we speak of these three—ability, knowledge, use—the first of these is to be considered under the three heads, of what a man can do in memory, and understanding, and will. The second of them is to be considered in regard to that which any one has in his memory and in his understanding, which he has attained by a studious will. But the third, viz. use, lies in the will, which handles those things that are contained in the memory and understanding, whether it refer them to anything further, or rest satisfied with them as an end. For to use, is to take up something into the power of the will; and to enjoy, is to use with joy, not any longer of hope, but of the actual thing. Accordingly, every one who enjoys, uses; for he takes up something into the power of the will, in which he also is satisfied as with an end. But not every one who uses, enjoys, if he has sought after that, which he takes up into the power of the will, not on account of the thing itself, but on account of something else.

Since, then, these three, memory, understanding, will, are not three lives, but one life; nor three minds, but one mind; it follows certainly that neither are they three substances, but one substance. Since memory, which is called life, and mind, and substance, is so called in respect to itself; but it is called memory, relatively to something. And I should say the same also of understanding and of will, since they are called understanding and will relatively to something; but each in respect to itself is life, and mind, and essence. And hence these three are one, in that they are one life, one mind, one essence; and whatever else they are severally called in respect to themselves, they are called also together, not plurally, but in the singular number. But they are three, in that in which they are mutually referred to each other; and if they were not equal, and this not only each to each, but also each to all, they certainly could not mutually contain each other; for not only is each contained by each, but also all by each.

For I remember that I have memory and understanding, and will; and I understand that I understand, and will, and remember; and I will that I will, and remember, and understand; and I remember together my whole memory, and understanding, and will. For that of my memory which I do not remember, is not in my memory; and nothing is so much in the memory as memory itself. Therefore I remember the whole memory. Also, whatever I understand I know that I understand, and I know that I will whatever I will; but whatever I know I remember. Therefore I remember the whole of my understanding, and the whole of my will. Likewise, when I understand these three things, I understand them together as whole. For there is none of things intelligible which I do not understand, except what I do not know; but what I do not know, I neither remember, nor will. Therefore, whatever of things intelligible I do not understand, it follows also that I neither remember nor will. And whatever of things intelligible I remember and will, it follows that I understand.

My will also embraces my whole understanding and my whole memory while I use the whole that I understand and remember. And, therefore, while all are mutually comprehended by each, and as wholes, each as a whole is equal to each as a whole, and each as a whole at the same time to all as wholes; and these three are one, one life, one mind, one essence.

Are we, then, now to go upward, with whatever strength of purpose we may, to that chiefest and highest essence, of which the human mind is an inadequate image, yet an image? Or are these same three things to be yet more distinctly made plain in the soul, by means of those things which we receive from without, through the bodily sense, in which the knowledge of corporeal things is impressed upon us in time? Since we found the mind itself to be such in its own memory, and understanding, and will, that since it was understood always to know and always to will itself, it was understood also at the same time always to remember itself, always to understand and love itself, although not always to

think of itself as separate from those things which are not itself; and hence its memory of itself, and understanding of itself, are with difficult discerned in it. For in this case, where these two things are very closely conjoined, and one is not preceded by the other by any time at all, it looks as if they were not two things, but one called by two names; and love itself is not so plainly felt to exist when the sense of need does not disclose it, since what is loved is always at hand.

And hence these things may be more lucidly set forth, even to men of duller minds, if such topics are treated of as are brought within reach of the mind in time, and happen to it in time; while it remembers what it did not remember before, and sees what it did not see before, and loves what it did not love before. But this discussion demands now another beginning, by reason of the measure of the present book.

Reading Notes

1. The first reading concludes at On the Trinity IX.4. The second resumes at X.10; the intervening chapters are not reproduced.

2. The triads are human analogies used in a theological inquiry. Augustine’s distinctions between the human mind and the divine Trinity remain part of his larger argument.

PART IV

Time and Eternity

The account of time in the Confessions begins in prayer. Augustine asks to understand the opening of Genesis, and that desire draws him into questions about creation, divine speech, change, and the very possibility of a beginning. The passages in this part preserve that movement. They include the complete eleventh book, distributed across three chapters, together with the opening chapters of Book XII on the formlessness of created matter.

The inquiry becomes increasingly personal. Augustine can speak about time and recognize its passage, yet struggles to say what time is. The past is absent, the future has not arrived, and the present seems to vanish as soon as it is identified. Nevertheless, people remember, anticipate, measure, sing, and tell their lives. His investigation turns toward the activities through which the soul holds these changing experiences together.

Eternity enters the discussion as the life of the Creator, whose knowing and willing are not successive acts. Augustine's descriptions of temporal experience are inseparable from that theological distinction. His language invites patient attention to an argument that often advances by questions, provisional answers, and corrections.

CHAPTER 10

Creation and the Beginning of Time

The opening movement of Book XI asks how divine speech can create a world without itself becoming a passing sound. An ordinary spoken word begins and ends; its syllables occupy successive moments. Augustine asks his reader to consider a Word whose reality is not exhausted by such succession. The act of creation therefore raises a question about the relation between temporal effects and an eternal source.

The familiar question about what God was doing before creating the world receives a careful answer. Augustine rejects the picture of God passing through an indefinitely long period of inactivity and then deciding to act. That picture has already placed God within the time whose origin is under discussion. If time belongs to creation, a period before the creation of time cannot be described as another period of time.

The second reading moves into Book XII and considers formless matter. Augustine distinguishes the created world's changeability from the Creator's unchanging life. He struggles to think about a condition that is not simply nothing and yet lacks the forms by which things are ordinarily recognized. The difficulty matters because his account of creation requires attention both to the source of existence and to the ordering through which a changing world becomes intelligible.

These passages retain the prayers and scriptural questions surrounding the philosophical reasoning. They show how Augustine arrives at the problem rather than presenting only its most frequently quoted conclusions.

Augustine

The Eternal Word and the Creation of Time

Confessions · Book XI, chapters 1–13

O Lord, since eternity is Yours, are You ignorant of the things which I say to You? Or do You see in time what comes to pass in time? Why, therefore, do I place before You so many accounts of events? Not surely that You might know them through me, but that I may awaken my own love and that of my readers toward You, that we may all say, “Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised.” As I have already said, and will say again, I do this for the love of Your love. For we also pray, and yet Truth says, “Your Father knows what things you have need of before you ask Him.” Therefore we make our love known to You, in confessing to You our own miseries and Your mercies upon us, that You may free us altogether, since You have begun, that we may cease to be wretched in

ourselves, and that we may be blessed in You; since You have called us, that we may be poor in spirit, and meek, and mourners, and hungering and thirsty after righteousness, and merciful, and pure in heart, and peacemakers. Look, I have told You many things, which I could and which I would, because You first willed that I should confess to You, the Lord my God, for You are good, since Your "mercy endures forever."

But when shall I suffice with the tongue of my pen to express all Your exhortations, and all Your terrors, and comforts, and guidances, by which You have led me to preach Your Word and to dispense Your Sacrament to Your people? And if I suffice to utter these things in order, the drops of time are precious to me. For a long time I have burned to meditate in Your law, and in it to confess to You my knowledge and ignorance, the beginning of Your enlightening, and the remains of my darkness, until weakness is swallowed up by strength. I do not want the hours that I find free to flow away into anything else: the hours left by the needs of my body, the care of my mind, and the service we owe to others, including the service we still give even when we do not owe it.

O Lord my God, hear my prayer, and let Your mercy regard my longing, since it burns not for myself alone, but because it desires to benefit brotherly love; and You see into my heart, that so it is. I would sacrifice to You the service of my thought and tongue; and do You give what I may offer to You. For "I am poor and needy," You rich to all that call upon You, who free from care care for us. Circumcise from all rashness and from all lying my inward and outward lips. Let Your Scriptures be my chaste delights. Neither let me be deceived in them, nor deceive out of them. Lord, hear and pity, O Lord my God, light of the blind, and strength of the weak; even also light of those that see, and strength of the strong, hearken to my soul, and hear it crying "out of the depths." For unless Your ears be present in the depths also, to where shall we go? to where shall we cry? "The day is Yours, and the night also is Yours." At Your nod the moments flee by.

Grant of it space for our meditations among the hidden things of Your law, nor close it against us who knock. For not in vain have You willed that the obscure secret of so many pages should be written. Nor is it that those forests have not their harts, betaking themselves in it, and ranging, and walking, and feeding, lying down, and ruminating. Perfect me, O Lord, and reveal them to me. Look, Your voice is my joy, Your voice surpasses the abundance of pleasures. Give that which I love, for I do love; and this have You given. Abandon not Your own gifts, nor despise Your grass that thirsts. Let me confess to You whatever I shall have found in Your books, and let me hear the voice of praise, and let me imbibe You, and reflect on the wonderful things of Your law; even from the beginning, in which You made the heaven and the earth, to the everlasting kingdom of Your holy city that is with You.

Lord, have mercy on me and hear my desire. For I think that it is not of the earth, nor of gold and silver, and precious stones, nor gorgeous apparel, nor honors and powers, nor the pleasures of the flesh, nor necessaries for the body, and this life of our pilgrimage; all which are added to those that seek Your kingdom and Your righteousness. Look, O Lord my God, from where is my desire. The unrighteous have told me of delights, but not such as Your law, O Lord. Look from where is my desire. Look, Father, look and see, and approve; and let it be pleasing in the sight of Your mercy, that I may find grace before You, that the secret things of Your Word may be opened to me when I knock. I beseech, by our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, "the Man of Your right hand, the Son of man, whom You made strong for Yourself," as Your Mediator and ours, through whom You have sought us, although not seeking You, but did seek us that we might seek You,—Your Word through whom You have made all things, and among them me also, Your Only-begotten, through whom You have called to adoption the believing people, and in it me also.

I beseech You through Him, who sits at Your right hand, and "makes intercession for us," "in whom are hid all treasures of wisdom and knowledge." He is the one I seek in Your books. Of Him did Moses write; this says Himself; this says the Truth.

Let me hear and understand how in the beginning You did make the heaven and the earth. Moses wrote this; he wrote and departed,—passed hence from You to You. Nor now is he before me; for if he were I would hold him, and ask him, and would adjure him by You that he would open to me these things, and I would lend the ears of my body to the sounds bursting forth from his mouth. And should he speak in the Hebrew tongue, in vain would it beat on my senses, nor would anything touch my mind; but if in Latin, I should know what he said. But from where should I know whether he said what was true? But if I knew this even, should I know it from him? Verily within me, within in the chamber of my thought, Truth, neither Hebrew, nor Greek, nor Latin, nor barbarian, without the organs of voice and tongue, without the sound of syllables, would say, "He speaks the truth," and I, forthwith assured of it, confidently would say to that man of Yours, "You speak the truth." As, then, I cannot inquire of him, I beseech You,—You, O Truth, full of whom he spoke truth,—You, my God, I beseech, forgive my sins; and do You, who did give to that Your servant to speak these things, grant to me also to understand them.

Look, the heaven and earth are; they proclaim that they were made, for they are changed and varied. Whereas whatever has not been made, and yet has being, has nothing in it which there was not before; this is what it is to be changed and varied. They also proclaim that they made not themselves; "therefore we are, because we have been made; we were not therefore before we were, so that we could have made ourselves." And the voice of those that

speak is in itself an evidence. You, therefore, Lord, did make these things; You who are beautiful, for they are beautiful; You who are good, for they are good; You who are, for they are. Nor even so are they beautiful, nor good, nor are they, as You their Creator are; compared with whom they are neither beautiful, nor good, nor are at all. These things we know, thanks be to You. And our knowledge, compared with Your knowledge, is ignorance.

But how did You make the heaven and the earth, and what was the instrument of Your so mighty work? For it was not as a human worker fashioning body from body, according to the fancy of his mind, in somewise able to assign a form which it perceives in itself by its inner eye. And from where should he be able to do this, had not You made that mind? And he assigns to it already existing, and as it were having a being, a form, as clay, or stone, or wood, or gold, or such like. And from where should these things be, had not You appointed them? You did make for the workman his body,—You the mind commanding the limbs,—You the matter of which he makes anything,—You the capacity by which he may apprehend his art, and see within what he may do without,—You the sense of his body, by which, as by an interpreter, he may from mind to matter convey that which he does, and report to his mind what may have been done, that it within may consult the truth, presiding over itself, whether it be well done.

All these things praise You, the Creator of all. But how do You make them? How, O God, did You make heaven and earth? Truly, neither in the heaven nor in the earth did You make heaven and earth; nor in the air, nor in the waters, since these also belong to the heaven and the earth; nor in the whole world did You make the whole world; because there was no place in which it could be made before it was made, that it might be; nor did You hold anything in Your hand with which to make heaven and earth. For from where could You have what You had not made, of which to make anything? For what is, save because You are? Therefore You did speak and they were made, and in Your Word You made these things.

But how did You speak? Was it in that manner in which the voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my beloved Son”? For that voice was uttered and passed away, began and ended. The syllables sounded and passed by, the second after the first, the third after the second, and from there in order, until the last after the rest, and silence after the last. Hence it is clear and plain that the motion of a creature expressed it, itself temporal, obeying Your Eternal will. And these your words formed at the time, the outer ear conveyed to the intelligent mind, whose inner ear lay attentive to Your eternal word. But it compared these words sounding in time with Your eternal word in silence, and said, “It is different, very different. These words are far beneath me, nor are they, since they flee and pass away; but the Word of my Lord remains above me forever.” If, then, in sounding and fleeting words You did say that heaven and earth should

be made, and did thus make heaven and earth, there was already a corporeal creature before heaven and earth by whose temporal motions that voice might take its course in time.

But there was nothing corporeal before heaven and earth; or if there were, certainly You without a transitory voice had created that from where You would make the passing voice, by which to say that the heaven and the earth should be made. For whatever that were of which such a voice was made, unless it were made by You, it could not be at all. By what word of Yours was it decreed that a body might be made, by which these words might be made?

You call us, therefore, to understand the Word, God with You, God, which is spoken eternally, and by it are all things spoken eternally. For what was spoken was not finished, and another spoken until all were spoken; but all things at once and forever. For otherwise have we time and change, and not a true eternity, nor a true immortality. This I know, O my God, and give thanks. I know, I confess to You, O Lord, and whoever is not unthankful to certain truth, knows and blesses You with me. We know, O Lord, we know; since in proportion as anything is not what it was, and is what it was not, in that proportion does it die and arise. Not anything, therefore, of Your Word gives place and comes into place again, because it is truly immortal and eternal. And, therefore, to the Word co-eternal with You, You do at once and forever say all that You do say; and whatever You say shall be made, is made; nor do You make otherwise than by speaking; yet all things are not made both together and everlasting which You make by speaking.

Why is this, I beseech You, O Lord my God? I see it, however; but how I shall express it, I do not know, unless that everything which begins to be and ceases to be, then begins and ceases when in Your eternal Reason it is known that it ought to begin or cease where nothing begins or ceases. The same is Your Word, which is also “the Beginning,” because also It speaks to us. Thus, in the gospel He speaks through the flesh; and this sounded outwardly in the ears of men, that it might be believed and sought inwardly, and that it might be found in the eternal Truth, where the good and only Master teaches all His disciples. There, O Lord, I hear Your voice, the voice of one speaking to me, since He speaks to us who teaches us. But He that teaches us not, although He speaks, speaks not to us. Moreover, who teaches us, unless it be the immutable Truth? For even when we are admonished through a changeable creature, we are led to the Truth immutable.

There we learn truly while we stand and hear Him, and rejoice greatly “because of the Bridegroom’s voice,” restoring us to that from where we are. And, therefore, the Beginning, because unless It remained, there would not, where we strayed, be to where to return. But when we return from error, it is by knowing that we return. But that we may know, He teaches us, because He is the Beginning and speaks to us.

In this Beginning, O God, have You made heaven and earth,—in Your Word, in Your Son, in Your Power, in Your Wisdom, in Your Truth, wondrously speaking and wondrously making. Who shall comprehend? who shall relate it? What is that which shines through me, and strikes my heart without injury, and I both shudder and burn? I shudder inasmuch as I am unlike it; and I burn inasmuch as I am like it. It is Wisdom itself that shines through me, clearing my cloudiness, which again overwhelms me, fainting from it, in the darkness and amount of my punishment. For my strength is brought down in need, so that I cannot endure my blessings, until You, O Lord, who have been gracious to all my iniquities, heal also all mine infirmities; because You shall also redeem my life from corruption, and crown me with Your loving-kindness and mercy, and shall satisfy my desire with good things, because my youth shall be renewed like the eagle’s. For by hope we are saved; and through patience we await Your promises. Let him that is able hear You discoursing within. I will with confidence cry out from Your oracle, How wonderful are Your works, O Lord, in Wisdom have You made them all. And this Wisdom is the Beginning, and in that Beginning have You made heaven and earth.

Look, are they not full of their ancient way, who say to us, “What was God doing before He made heaven and earth? For if,” say they, “He were unoccupied, and did nothing, why does He not forever also, and from from now on, cease from working, as in times past He did? For if any new motion has arisen in God, and a new will, to form a creature which He had never before formed, however can that be a true eternity where there arises a will which was not before? For the will of God is not a creature, but before the creature; because nothing could be created unless the will of the Creator were before it. The will of God, therefore, pertains to His very Substance. But if anything has arisen in the Substance of God which was not before, that Substance is not truly called eternal. But if it was the eternal will of God that the creature should be, why was not the creature also from eternity?”

Those who say these things do not as yet understand You, O You Wisdom of God, You light of souls; not as yet do they understand how these things be made which are made by and in You. They even endeavor to comprehend things eternal; but as yet their heart flies about in the past and future motions of things, and is still wavering. Who shall hold it and fix it, that it may rest a little, and by degrees catch the glory of that everstanding eternity, and compare it with the times which never stand, and see that it is incomparable; and that a long time cannot become long, save from the many motions that pass by, which cannot at the same instant be prolonged; but that in the Eternal nothing passes away, but that the whole is present; but no time is wholly present; and let him see that all time past is forced on by the future, and that all the future follows from the past, and that all, both past and future, is created and issues from that

which is always present? Who will hold the heart of man, that it may stand still, and see how the still-standing eternity, itself neither future nor past, utters the times future and past? Can my hand accomplish this, or the hand of my mouth by persuasion bring about a thing so great?

Look, I answer to him who asks, “What was God doing before He made heaven and earth?” I answer not, as a certain person is reported to have done facetiously (avoiding the pressure of the question), “He was preparing hell,” says he, “for those who pry into mysteries.” It is one thing to perceive, another to laugh,—these things I answer not. For more willingly would I have answered, “I do not know what I do not know,” than that I should make him a laughing-stock who asks deep things, and gain praise as one who answers false things. But I say that You, our God, are the Creator of every creature; and if by the term “heaven and earth” every creature is understood, I boldly say, “That before God made heaven and earth, He made not anything. For if He did, what did He make unless the creature?” And would that I knew whatever I desire to know to my advantage, as I know that no creature was made before any creature was made.

But if the roving thought of any one should wander through the images of bygone time, and wonder that You, the God Almighty, and All-creating, and All-sustaining, the Architect of heaven and earth, did for innumerable ages refrain from so great a work before You would make it, let him awake and consider that he wonders at false things. For from where could innumerable ages pass by which You did not make, since You are the Author and Creator of all ages? Or what times should those be which were not made by You? Or how should they pass by if they had not been? Since, therefore, You are the Creator of all times, if any time was before You made heaven and earth, why is it said that You did refrain from working? For that very time You made, nor could times pass by before You made times. But if before heaven and earth there was no time, why is it asked, What did You then? For there was no “then” when time was not.

Nor do You by time precede time; else would not You precede all times. But in the excellency of an ever-present eternity, You precede all times past, and survive all future times, because they are future, and when they have come they will be past; but “You are the same, and Your years shall have no end.” Your years neither go nor come; but ours both go and come, that all may come. All Your years stand at once since they do stand; nor were they when departing excluded by coming years, because they pass not away; but all these of ours shall be when all shall cease to be. Your years are one day, and Your day is not daily, but today; because Your today yields not with tomorrow, for neither does it follow yesterday. Your today is eternity; therefore You begot the Co-eternal, to whom You said, “This day have I begotten You.” You have made all time; and before all times You are, nor in any time was there not time.

Formlessness and the Created World

Confessions · Book XII, chapters 1–9

My heart, O Lord, affected by the words of Your Holy Scripture, is much busied in this poverty of my life; and therefore, for the most part, is the want of human intelligence copious in language, because inquiry speaks more than discovery, and because demanding is longer than obtaining, and the hand that knocks is more active than the hand that receives. We hold the promise; who shall break it? “If God be for us, who can be against us?” “Ask, and you shall have; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you: forevery one that asks receives; and he that seeks finds; and to him that knocks it shall be opened.” These are Your own promises; and who need fear to be deceived where the Truth promises?

The weakness of my tongue confesses to Your Highness, seeing that You made heaven and earth. This heaven which I see, and this earth upon which I tread (from which is this earth that I carry about me), You have made. But where is that heaven of heavens, O Lord, of which we hear in the words of the Psalm, The heaven of heavens are the Lord’s, but the earth has He given to the children of men? Where is the heaven, which we do not see, in comparison of which all this, which we see, is earth? For this corporeal whole, not as a whole everywhere, has thus received its beautiful figure in these lower parts, of which the bottom is our earth; but compared with that heaven of heavens, even the heaven of our earth is but earth; yes, each of these great bodies is not absurdly called earth, as compared with that, I do not know what manner of heaven, which is the Lord’s, not the sons’ of men.

And truly this earth was invisible and formless, and there was I do not know what profundity of the deep upon which there was no light, because it had no form. Therefore did You command that it should be written, that darkness was upon the face of the deep; what else was it than the absence of light? For had there been light, where should it have been save by being above all, showing itself aloft, and enlightening? Darkness therefore was upon it, because the light above was absent; as silence is there present where sound is not. And what is it to have silence there, but not to have sound there? Have not You, O Lord, taught this soul which confesses to You? Have not You taught me, O Lord, that before You did form and separate this formless matter, there was nothing, neither color, nor figure, nor body, nor spirit? Yet not altogether nothing; there was a certain formlessness without any shape.

What, then, should it be called, that even in some ways it might be conveyed to those of duller mind, save by some conventional word? But what, in all parts of the world, can be found nearer to a total formlessness than the earth and the deep? For, from their being of the lowest position, they are less beautiful than

are the other higher parts, all transparent and shining. Why, therefore, may I not consider the formlessness of matter—which You had created without shape, of which to make this shapely world—to be fittingly intimated to men by the name of earth invisible and formless?

So that when in this thought seeks what the sense may arrive at, and says to itself, “It is no intelligible form, such as life or justice, because it is the matter of bodies; nor perceptible by the senses, because in the invisible and formless there is nothing which can be seen and felt;—while human thought says these things to itself, it may endeavor either to know it by being ignorant, or by knowing it to be ignorant.

But were I, O Lord, by my mouth and by my pen to confess to You the whole, whatever You have taught me concerning that matter, the name of which hearing beforehand, and not understanding (they who could not understand it telling me of it), I conceived it as having innumerable and varied forms. And therefore did I not conceive it; my mind revolved in disturbed order foul and horrible “forms,” but yet “forms;” and I called it formless, not that it lacked form, but because it had such as, did it appear, my mind would turn from, as unwonted and incongruous, and at which human weakness would be disturbed. But even that which I did conceive was formless, not by the privation of all form, but in comparison of more beautiful forms; and true reason persuaded me that I ought altogether to remove from it all remnants of any form whatever, if I wished to conceive matter wholly without form; and I could not. For sooner could I imagine that that which should be deprived of all form was not at all, than conceive anything between form and nothing,—neither formed, nor nothing, formless, nearly nothing.

And my mind hence ceased to question my spirit, filled (as it was) with the images of formed bodies, and changing and varying them according to its will; and I applied myself to the bodies themselves, and looked more deeply into their mutability, by which they cease to be what they had been, and begin to be what they were not; and this same transit from form to form I have looked upon to be through some formless condition, not through a very nothing; but I desired to know, not to guess. And if my voice and my pen should confess the whole to You, whatever knots You have untied for me concerning this question, who of my readers would endure to take in the whole? Nor yet, therefore, shall my heart cease to give You honor, and a song of praise, for those things which it is not able to express. For the mutability of mutable things is itself capable of all those forms into which mutable things are changed. And this mutability, what is it? Is it soul?

Is it body? Is it the outer appearance of soul or body? Could it be said, “Nothing were something,” and “That which is, is not,” I would say that this

were it; and yet in some manner was it already, since it could receive these visible and compound shapes.

And from where and in what manner was this, unless from You, from whom are all things, in so far as they are? But by how much the farther from You, so much the more unlike to You; for it is not distance of place. You, therefore, O Lord, who are not one thing in one place, and otherwise in another, but the Self-same, and the Self-same, and the Self-same, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, did in the beginning, which is of You, in Your Wisdom, which was born of Your Substance, create something, and that out of nothing. For You did create heaven and earth, not out of Yourself, for then they would be equal to Your Only-begotten, and by that even to You; and in no wise would it be right that anything should be equal to You which was not of You. And anything else except You there was not from where You might create these things, O God, One Trinity, and Trine Unity; and, therefore, out of nothing did You create heaven and earth,—a great thing and a small, because You are Almighty and Good, to make all things good, even the great heaven and the small earth.

You were, and there was nothing else from which You did create heaven and earth; two such things, one near to You, the other near to nothing,—one to which You should be superior, the other to which nothing should be inferior.

But that heaven of heavens was for You, O Lord; but the earth, which You have given to the sons of men, to be seen and touched, was not such as now we see and touch. For it was invisible and “without form,” and there was a deep over which there was not light; or, darkness was over the deep, that is, more than in the deep. For this deep of waters, now visible, has, even in its depths, a light suitable to its nature, perceptible in some manner to fishes and creeping things in the bottom of it. But the entire deep was almost nothing, since until now it was altogether formless; yet there was then that which could be formed. For You, O Lord, have made the world of a formless matter, which matter, out of nothing, You have made almost nothing, out of which to make those great things which we, sons of men, wonder at. For very wonderful is this corporeal heaven, of which firmament, between water and water, the second day after the creation of light, You said, Let it be made, and it was made.

Which firmament You called heaven, that is, the heaven of this earth and sea, which You made on the third day, by giving a visible shape to the formless matter which You made before all days. For even already had You made a heaven before all days, but that was the heaven of this heaven; because in the beginning You had made heaven and earth. But the earth itself which You had made was formless matter, because it was invisible and without form, and darkness was upon the deep. Of which invisible and formless earth, of which formlessness, of which almost nothing, You might make all these things of which this changeable world consists, and yet consists not; whose very changeableness

appears in this, that times can be observed and numbered in it. Because times are made by the changes of things, while the shapes, whose matter is the invisible earth aforesaid, are varied and turned.

And therefore the Spirit, the Teacher of Your servant when He relates that You did in the Beginning create heaven and earth, is silent as to times, silent as to days. For, doubtless, that heaven of heavens, which You in the Beginning did create, is some intellectual creature, which, although in no wise co-eternal to You, the Trinity, is yet a partaker of Your eternity, and by reason of the sweetness of that most happy contemplation of Yourself, does greatly restrain its own mutability, and without any failure, from the time in which it was created, in clinging to You, surpasses all the rolling change of times. But this shapelessness —this earth invisible and without form—has not itself been numbered among the days. For where there is no shape nor order, nothing either comes or goes; and where this is not, there certainly are no days, nor any vicissitude of spaces of times.

Reading Notes

1. The first reading contains Confessions XI.1–13 without internal omissions. The second contains XII.1–9. Book and chapter locations refer to the historical Pilkington translation.

CHAPTER 11

Past Present and Future

Augustine now turns from the origin of time to the experience of its passage. His starting point is deliberately ordinary. People call some intervals long and others short, speak about past events and future possibilities, and understand one another when they do so. The language works in everyday life even though its object becomes elusive under examination.

A past event no longer exists as a present event. A future event does not yet exist in that way. If the present had no passage into the past, Augustine reasons, it would resemble eternity rather than time. Yet an extended present can itself be divided into earlier and later portions. The attempt to locate time in a stable object repeatedly fails.

Memory and expectation provide a different approach. A remembered event has left a present image or trace; an expected event is presently anticipated through signs, plans, or imagination. Augustine can therefore speak of a present of past things, a present of present things, and a present of future things. This formulation describes activities of the soul while preserving the distinction between what has happened, what is happening, and what may happen.

The questions in this reading are exploratory. Augustine returns to his own experience, tests familiar expressions, and acknowledges places where his explanation remains uncertain. His repeated appeals for understanding belong to the texture of the inquiry. The reader is invited to follow those revisions and to notice how much ordinary life assumes about a reality that resists easy definition.

Augustine

The Threefold Present

Confessions · Book XI, chapters 14–22

At no time, therefore, had You not made anything, because You had made time itself. And no times are co-eternal with You, because You remain forever; but should these continue, they would not be times. For what is time? Who can easily and briefly explain it? Who even in thought can comprehend it, even to the pronouncing of a word concerning it? But what in speaking do we refer to more familiarly and knowingly than time? And certainly we understand when we speak of it; we understand also when we hear it spoken of by another. What, then, is time? If no one ask of me, I know; if I wish to explain to him who asks, I do not know. Yet I say with confidence, that I know that if nothing passed away, there would not be past time; and if nothing were coming, there would not be future

time; and if nothing were, there would not be present time. Those two times, therefore, past and future, how are they, when even the past now is not; and the future is not as yet?

But should the present be always present, and should it not pass into time past, time truly it could not be, but eternity. If, then, time present—if it be time—only comes into existence because it passes into time past, how do we say that even this is, whose cause of being is that it shall not be—namely, so that we cannot truly say that time is, unless because it tends not to be?

And yet we say that "time is long and time is short;" nor do we speak of this save of time past and future. A long time past, for example, we call a hundred years ago; in like manner a long time to come, a hundred years hence. But a short time past we call, say, ten days ago: and a short time to come, ten days hence. But in what sense is that long or short which is not? For the past is not now, and the future is not yet. Therefore let us not say, "It is long;" but let us say of the past, "It has been long," and of the future, "It will be long." O my Lord, my light, shall not even here Your truth deride man? For that past time which was long, was it long when it was already past, or when it was as yet present? For then it might be long when there was that which could be long, but when past it no longer was; therefore that could not be long which was not at all.

Let us not, therefore, say, "Time past has been long;" for we shall not find what may have been long, seeing that since it was past it is not; but let us say "that present time was long, because when it was present it was long." For it had not as yet passed away so as not to be, and therefore there was that which could be long. But after it passed, that ceased also to be long which ceased to be.

Let us therefore see, O human soul, whether present time can be long; for to you is it given to perceive and to measure periods of time. What will you reply to me? Is a hundred years when present a long time? See, first, whether a hundred years can be present. For if the first year of these is current, that is present, but the other ninety and nine are future, and therefore they are not as yet. But if the second year is current, one is already past, the other present, the rest future. And thus, if we fix on any middle year of this hundred as present, those before it are past, those after it are future; therefore a hundred years cannot be present. See at least whether that year itself which is current can be present. For if its first month be current, the rest are future; if the second, the first has already passed, and the remainder are not yet. Therefore neither is the year which is current as a whole present; and if it is not present as a whole, then the year is not present.

For twelve months make the year, of which each individual month which is current is itself present, but the rest are either past or future. Although neither is that month which is current present, but one day only: if the first, the rest

being to come, if the last, the rest being past; if any of the middle, then between past and future.

Look, the present time, which alone we found could be called long, is abridged to the space scarcely of one day. But let us discuss even that, for there is not one day present as a whole. For it is made up of four-and-twenty hours of night and day, of which the first has the rest future, the last has them past, but any one of the intervening has those before it past, those after it future. And that one hour passes away in fleeting particles. Whatever of it has flown away is past, whatever remains is future. If any portion of time be conceived which cannot now be divided into even the minutest particles of moments, this only is that which may be called present; which, however, flies so rapidly from future to past, that it cannot be extended by any delay. For if it be extended, it is divided into the past and future; but the present has no space. Where, therefore, is the time which we may call long? Is it nature? Indeed we do not say, “It is long,” because it is not yet, so as to be long; but we say, “It will be long.” When, then, will it be?

For if even then, since yet it is future, it will not be long, because what may be long is not as yet; but it shall be long, when from the future, which does not yet exist, it shall already have begun to be, and will have become present, so that there could be that which may be long; then does the present time cry out in the words above that it cannot be long.

And yet, O Lord, we perceive intervals of times, and we compare them with themselves, and we say some are longer, others shorter. We even measure by how much shorter or longer this time may be than that; and we answer, “That this is double or treble, while that is but once, or only as much as that.” But we measure times passing when we measure them by perceiving them; but past times, which no longer exist, or future times, which as yet are not, who can measure them? Unless, perhaps, any one will dare to say, that that can be measured which is not. When, therefore, time is passing, it can be perceived and measured; but when it has passed, it cannot, since it is not.

I ask, Father, I do not affirm. O my God, rule and guide me. “Who is there who can say to me that there are not three times (as we learned when boys, and as we have taught boys), the past, present, and future, but only present, because these two are not? Or are they also; but when from future it becomes present, comes it forth from some secret place, and when from the present it becomes past, does it retire into anything secret? For where have they, who have foretold future things, seen these things, if as yet they are not? For that which is not cannot be seen. And they who relate things past could not relate them as true, did they not perceive them in their mind. Which things, if they were not, they could in no wise be discerned. There are therefore things both future and past.

Suffer me, O Lord, to seek further; O my Hope, let not my purpose be confounded. For if there are times past and future, I desire to know where they are. But if as yet I do not succeed, I still know, wherever they are, that they are not there as future or past, but as present. For if there also they be future, they are not as yet there; if even there they be past, they are no longer there. Wherever, therefore, they are, whatever they are, they are only so as present. Although past things are related as true, they are drawn out from the memory,—not the things themselves, which have passed, but the words conceived from the images of the things which they have formed in the mind as footprints in their passage through the senses. My childhood, indeed, which no longer is, is in time past, which now is not; but when I call to mind its image, and speak of it, I behold it in the present, because it is as yet in my memory.

Whether there be a like cause of foretelling future things, that of things which as yet are not the images may be perceived as already existing, I confess, my God, I do not know. This certainly I know, that we generally think before on our future actions, and that this premeditation is present; but that the action whereon we premeditate is not yet, because it is future; which when we shall have entered upon, and have begun to do that which we were premeditating, then shall that action be, because then it is not future, but present.

In whatever manner, therefore, this secret preconception of future things may be, nothing can be seen, save what is. But what now is is not future, but present. When, therefore, they say that things future are seen, it is not themselves, which as yet are not (that is, which are future); but their causes or their signs perhaps are seen, which already are. Therefore, to those already beholding them, they are not future, but present, from which future things conceived in the mind are foretold. Which conceptions again now are, and they who foretell those things behold these conceptions present before them. Let now so multitudinous a variety of things afford me some example. I see daybreak; I foretell that the sun is about to rise. That which I see is present; what I foretell is future,—not that the sun is future, which already is; but his rising, which is not yet. Yet even its rising I could not predict unless I had an image of it in my mind, as now I have while I speak. But that dawn which I see in the sky is not the rising of the sun, although it may go before it, nor that imagination in my mind; which two are seen as present, that the other which is future may be foretold.

Future things, therefore, are not as yet; and if they are not as yet, they are not. And if they are not, they cannot be seen at all; but they can be foretold from things present which now are, and are seen.

You, therefore, Ruler of Your creatures, what is the method by which You teach souls those things which are future? For You have taught Your prophets. What is that way by which You, to whom nothing is future, do teach future things; or rather of future things do teach present? For what is not, of a

certainty cannot be taught. Too far is this way from my view; it is too mighty for me, I cannot attain to it; but by You I shall be enabled, when You shall have granted it, sweet light of my hidden eyes.

But what now is manifest and clear is, that neither are there future nor past things. Nor is it fitly said, “There are three times, past, present and future;” but perhaps it might be fitly said, “There are three times; a present of things past, a present of things present, and a present of things future.” For these three do somehow exist in the soul, and otherwise I see them not: present of things past, memory; present of things present, sight; present of things future, expectation. If of these things we are permitted to speak, I see three times, and I grant there are three. It may also be said, “There are three times, past, present and future,” as usage falsely has it. See, I trouble not, nor gainsay, nor reprove; provided always that which is said may be understood, that neither the future, nor that which is past, now is. For there are but few things which we speak properly, many things improperly; but what we may wish to say is understood.

I have just now said, then, that we measure times as they pass, that we may be able to say that this time is twice as much as that one, or that this is only as much as that, and so of any other of the parts of time which we are able to tell by measuring. Therefore, as I said, we measure times as they pass. And if any one should ask me, “From where do you know?” I can answer, “I know, because we measure; nor can we measure things that are not; and things past and future are not.” But how do we measure present time, since it has not space? It is measured while it passes; but when it shall have passed, it is not measured; for there will not be anything that can be measured. But from where, in what way, and to where does it pass while it is being measured? From where, but from the future? Which way, save through the present? To where, but into the past? From that, therefore, which does not yet exist, through that which has no space, into that which now is not.

But what do we measure, unless time in some space? For we say not single, and double, and triple, and equal, or in any other way in which we speak of time, unless with respect to the spaces of times. In what space, then, do we measure passing time? Is it in the future, from where it passes over? But what yet we measure not, is not. Or is it in the present, by which it passes? But no space, we do not measure. Or in the past, to where it passes? But that which is not now, we measure not.

My soul yearns to know this most entangled enigma. Forbear to shut up, O Lord my God, good Father,—through Christ I beseech You,—forbear to shut up these things, both usual and hidden, from my desire, that it may be hindered from penetrating them; but let them dawn through Your enlightening mercy, O Lord. Of whom shall I inquire concerning these things? And to whom shall I with more advantage confess my ignorance than to You, to whom these my studies, so

vehemently kindled toward Your Scriptures, are not troublesome? Give that which I love; for I do love, and this have You given me. Give, Father, who truly know to give good gifts to Your children. Give, since I have undertaken to know, and trouble is before me until You do open it. Through Christ, I beseech You, in His name, Holy of Holies, let no man interrupt me. For I believed, and therefore I speak. This is my hope; for this I live, that I may contemplate the delights of the Lord. Look, You have made my days old, and they pass away, and in what manner I do not know.

And we speak as to time and time, times and times,—“How long is the time since he said this?” “How long the time since he did this?” and, “How long the time since I saw that?” and, “This syllable has double the time of that single short syllable.” These words we speak, and these we hear; and we are understood, and we understand. They are most manifest and most usual, and the same things again lie hid too deeply, and the discovery of them is new.

Reading Notes

1. This reading continues directly from Confessions XI.13 in the preceding chapter and contains XI.14–22 without internal omissions.

CHAPTER 12

The Soul Within Time

The final movement of Book XI asks how duration can be measured. Augustine distinguishes time from the movement of a particular body: a body may move or remain still, and both its motion and its rest can be spoken of as lasting for an interval. The thing measured and the measure cannot simply be identified with the movement of the sun, a wheel, or any other visible object.

A spoken syllable becomes an important example. A sound can be heard while it occurs, but once it has ended the listener can still judge its duration and compare it with another sound. Augustine locates this possibility in the impression remaining in the soul. He then examines a song known by heart. Before singing, the song is held in expectation. As it is performed, attention carries what was expected into memory. The action is extended across these related activities.

This analysis opens onto the human condition. A life contains intentions, recollections, distractions, and unfinished desires. Its temporal extension can be experienced as a stretching or scattering of the soul. Augustine's prayer for gathering and steadiness gives the investigation an existential depth: understanding time concerns the kind of unity a changing person can seek.

The concluding chapters return to the difference between creature and Creator. Human knowledge of a song remains successive, even when the whole song is familiar. Augustine does not treat divine knowledge as a much longer version of that human experience. His final appeal preserves the distance between the experience he has examined and the eternity he seeks to understand.

Augustine

Measuring Duration and Gathering the Soul

Confessions · Book XI, chapters 23–31

I have heard from a learned man that the motions of the sun, moon, and stars constituted time, and I assented not. For why should not rather the motions of all bodies be time? What if the lights of heaven should cease, and a potter’s wheel run round, would there be no time by which we might measure those revolutions, and say either that it turned with equal pauses, or, if it were moved at one time more slowly, at another more quickly, that some revolutions were longer, others less so? Or while we were saying this, should we not also be speaking in time? Or should there in our words be some syllables long, others short, but because those sounded in a longer time, these in a shorter? God grant to men to see in a small thing ideas common to things great and small. Both the

stars and luminaries of heaven are “for signs and for seasons, and for days and years.” No doubt they are; but neither should I say that the circuit of that wooden wheel was a day, nor yet should he say that therefore there was no time.

I desire to know the power and nature of time, by which we measure the motions of bodies, and say (for example) that this motion is twice as long as that. For, I ask, since “day” declares not the stay only of the sun upon the earth, according to which day is one thing, night another, but also its entire circuit from east even to east,—according to which we say, “So many days have passed” (the nights being included when we say “so many days,” and their spaces not counted apart),—since, then, the day is finished by the motion of the sun, and by his circuit from east to east, I ask, whether the motion itself is the day, or the period in which that motion is completed, or both? For if the first be the day, then would there be a day although the sun should finish that course in so small a space of time as an hour. If the second, then that would not be a day if from one sunrise to another there were but so short a period as an hour, but the sun must go round four-and-twenty times to complete a day.

If both, neither could that be called a day if the sun should run his entire round in the space of an hour; nor that, if, while the sun stood still, so much time should pass as the sun is accustomed to accomplish his whole course in from morning to morning. I shall not therefore now ask, what that is which is called day, but what time is, by which we, measuring the circuit of the sun, should say that it was accomplished in half the space of time it was wont, if it had been completed in so small a space as twelve hours; and comparing both times, we should call that single, this double time, although the sun should run his course from east to east sometimes in that single, sometimes in that double time. Let no man then tell me that the motions of the heavenly bodies are times, because, when at the prayer of one the sun stood still in order that he might achieve his victorious battle, the sun stood still, but time went on.

For in such space of time as was sufficient was that battle fought and ended. I see that time, then, is a certain extension. But do I see it, or do I seem to see it? You, O Light and Truth, will show me.

Do You command that I should assent, if any one should say that time is “the motion of a body?” You do not command me. For I hear that no body is moved but in time. This You say; but that the very motion of a body is time, I hear not; You say it not. For when a body is moved, I by time measure how long it may be moving from the time in which it began to be moved till it left off. And if I saw not from where it began, and it continued to be moved, so that I do not see when it leaves off, I cannot measure unless, perhaps, from the time I began until I cease to see. But if I look long, I only proclaim that the time is long, but not how long it may be because when we say, “How long,” we speak by comparison, as, “This is as long as that,” or, “This is double as long as that,” or any other thing of

the kind. But if we were able to note down the distances of places from where and to where comes the body which is moved, or its parts, if it moved as in a wheel, we can say in how much time the motion of the body or its part, from this place to that, was performed.

Since, then, the motion of a body is one thing, that by which we measure how long it is another, who cannot see which of these is rather to be called time? For, although a body be sometimes moved, sometimes stand still, we measure not its motion only, but also its standing still, by time; and we say, “It stood still as much as it moved;” or, “It stood still twice or thrice as long as it moved;” and if any other space which our measuring has either determined or imagined, more or less, as we are accustomed to say. Time, therefore, is not the motion of a body.

And I confess to You, O Lord, that I am as yet ignorant as to what time is, and again I confess to You, O Lord, that I know that I speak these things in time, and that I have already long spoken of time, and that very “long” is not long save by the stay of time. How, then, know I this, when I do not know what time is? Or is it, perhaps, that I do not know how I may express what I know? Alas for me, that I do not at least know the extent of my own ignorance! Look, O my God, before You I lie not. As I speak, so is my heart. You shall light my candle; You, O Lord my God, will enlighten my darkness.

Does not my soul pour out to You truly in confession that I do measure times? But do I thus measure, O my God, and know not what I measure? I measure the motion of a body by time; and the time itself do I not measure? But, in truth, could I measure the motion of a body, how long it is, and how long it is in coming from this place to that, unless I should measure the time in which it is moved? How, therefore, do I measure this very time itself? Or do we by a shorter time measure a longer, as by the space of a cubit the space of a crossbeam? For thus, indeed, we seem by the space of a short syllable to measure the space of a long syllable, and to say that this is double. Thus we measure the spaces of stanzas by the spaces of the verses, and the spaces of the verses by the spaces of the feet, and the spaces of the feet by the spaces of the syllables, and the spaces of long by the spaces of short syllables; not measuring by pages (for in that manner we measure spaces, not times), but when in uttering the words they pass by, and we say, “It is a long stanza because it is made up of so many verses; long verses, because they consist of so many feet; long feet, because they are prolonged by so many syllables; a long syllable, because double a short one.” But neither thus is any certain measure of time obtained; since it is possible that a shorter verse, if it be pronounced more fully, may take up more time than a longer one, if pronounced more hurriedly.

Thus for a stanzas, thus for a foot, thus for a syllable. From where it appeared to me that time is nothing else than protraction; but of what I do not know. It is

wonderful to me, if it be not of the mind itself. For what do I measure, I beseech You, O my God, even when I say either indefinitely, “This time is longer than that;” or even definitely, “This is double that?” That I measure time, I know. But I do not measure the future, for it is not yet; nor do I measure the present, because it is extended by no space; nor do I measure the past, because it no longer is. What, therefore, do I measure? Is it times passing, not past? For thus had I said.

Persevere, O my mind, and give earnest heed. God is our helper; He made us, and not we ourselves. Give heed, where truth dawns. Look, suppose the voice of a body begins to sound, and does sound, and sounds on, and look! it ceases,—it is now silence, and that voice is past and is no longer a voice. It was future before it sounded, and could not be measured, because as yet it was not; and now it cannot, because it no longer is. Then, therefore, while it was sounding, it might, because there was then that which might be measured. But even then it did not stand still, for it was going and passing away. Could it, then, on that account be measured the more? For, while passing, it was being extended into some space of time, in which it might be measured, since the present has no space. If, therefore, then it might be measured, look! suppose another voice has begun to sound, and still sounds, in a continued tenor without any interruption, we can measure it while it is sounding; for when it shall have ceased to sound, it will be already past, and there will not be that which can be measured.

Let us measure it truly, and let us say how much it is. But as yet it sounds, nor can it be measured, save from that instant in which it began to sound, even to the end in which it left off. For the interval itself we measure from some beginning to some end. On which account, a voice which is not yet ended cannot be measured, so that it may be said how long or how short it may be; nor can it be said to be equal to another, or single or double in respect of it, or the like. But when it is ended, it no longer is. In what manner, therefore, may it be measured? And yet we measure times; still not those which as yet are not, nor those which no longer are, nor those which are protracted by some delay, nor those which have no limits. We, therefore, measure neither future times, nor past, nor present, nor those passing by; and yet we do measure times.

Deus Creator omnium; this verse of eight syllables alternates between short and long syllables. The four short, then, the first, third, fifth and seventh, are single in respect of the four long, the second, fourth, sixth, and eighth. Each of these has a double time to every one of those. I pronounce them, report on them, and thus it is, as is perceived by common sense. By common sense, then, I measure a long by a short syllable, and I find that it has twice as much. But when one sounds after another, if the former be short the latter long, how shall I hold the short one, and how measuring shall I apply it to the long, so that I may find out that this has twice as much, when indeed the long does not begin to

sound unless the short leaves off sounding? That very long one I do not measure as present, since I measure it not save when ended. But its ending is its passing away. What, then, is it that I can measure? Where is the short syllable by which I measure?

Where is the long one which I measure? Both have sounded, have flown, have passed away, and are no longer; and still I measure, and I confidently answer (so far as is trusted to a practiced sense), that as to space of time this syllable is single, that double. Nor could I do this, unless because they have past, and are ended. Therefore I do not measure those things themselves, which no longer exist, but something in my memory, which remains fixed.

In you, O my mind, I measure times. Do not overwhelm me with your clamor. That is, do not overwhelm yourself with the multitude of your impressions. In you, I say, I measure times; the impression which things as they pass by make on you, and which, when they have passed by, remains, that I measure as time present, not those things which have passed by, that the impression should be made. This I measure when I measure times. Either, then, these are times, or I do not measure times. What when we measure silence, and say that this silence has lasted as long as that voice lasts? Do we not extend our thought to the measure of a voice, as if it sounded, so that we may be able to declare something concerning the intervals of silence in a given space of time? For when both the voice and tongue are still, we go over in thought poems and verses, and any discourse, or dimensions of motions; and declare concerning the spaces of times, how much this may be in respect of that, not otherwise than if uttering them we should pronounce them.

Should any one wish to utter a lengthened sound, and had with forethought determined how long it should be, that man has in silence verily gone through a space of time, and, committing it to memory, he begins to utter that speech, which sounds until it be extended to the end proposed; truly it has sounded, and will sound. For what of it is already finished has verily sounded, but what remains will sound; and thus does it pass on, until the present intention carry over the future into the past; the past increasing by the diminution of the future, until, by the consumption of the future, all be past.

But how is that future diminished or consumed which does not yet exist? Or how does the past, which is no longer, increase, unless in the mind which enacts this there are three things done? For it both expects, and considers, and remembers, that that which it expects, through that which it considers, may pass into that which it remembers. Who, therefore, denies that future things as yet are not? But yet there is already in the mind the expectation of things future. And who denies that past things are now no longer? But, however, there is still in the mind the memory of things past. And who denies that time present wants space, because it passes away in a moment? But yet our consideration endures,

through which that which may be present may proceed to become absent. Future time, which is not, is not therefore long; but a “long future” is “a long expectation of the future.” Nor is time past, which is now no longer, long; but a long past is “a long memory of the past.”

I am about to repeat a psalm that I know. Before I begin, my attention is extended to the whole; but when I have begun, as much of it as becomes past by my saying it is extended in my memory; and the life of this action of mine is divided between my memory, on account of what I have repeated, and my expectation, on account of what I am about to repeat; yet my consideration is present with me, through which that which was future may be carried over so that it may become past. Which the more it is done and repeated, by so much (expectation being shortened) the memory is enlarged, until the whole expectation be exhausted, when that whole action being ended shall have passed into memory. And what takes place in the entire psalm, takes place also in each individual part of it, and in each individual syllable: this holds in the longer action, of which that psalm is perhaps a portion; the same holds in the whole life of man, of which all the actions of man are parts; the same holds in the whole age of the sons of men, of which all the lives of men are parts.

But “because Your loving-kindness is better than life,” look, my life is but a distraction, and Your right hand upheld me in my Lord, the Son of man, the Mediator between You, The One, and us the many,—in many distractions amid many things,—that through Him I may apprehend in whom I have been apprehended, and may be recollected from my old days, following The One, forgetting the things that are past; and not distracted, but drawn on, not to those things which shall be and shall pass away, but to those things which are before, not distractedly, but intently, I follow on for the prize of my heavenly calling, where I may hear the voice of Your praise, and contemplate Your delights, neither coming nor passing away. But now are my years spent in mourning. And You, O Lord, are my comfort, my Father everlasting. But I have been divided amid times, the order of which I do not know; and my thoughts, even the inmost bowels of my soul, are mangled with tumultuous varieties, until I flow together to You, purged and molten in the fire of Your love.

And I will be immoveable, and fixed in You, in my mold, Your truth; nor will I endure the questions of men, who by a penal disease thirst for more than they can hold, and say, “What did God make before He made heaven and earth?” Or, “How came it into His mind to make anything, when He never before made anything?” Grant to them, O Lord, to think well what they say, and to see that where there is no time, they cannot say “never.” What, therefore, He is said “never to have made,” what else is it but to say, that in no time was it made? Let them therefore see that there could be no time without a created being, and let them cease to speak that vanity. Let them also be extended to those things

which are before, and understand that you, the eternal Creator of all times, are before all times, and that no times are co-eternal with You, nor any creature, even if there be any creature beyond all times.

O Lord my God, what is that secret place of Your mystery, and how far from there have the consequences of my transgressions cast me? Heal my eyes, that I may enjoy Your light. Surely, if there be a mind, so greatly abounding in knowledge and foreknowledge, to which all things past and future are so known as one psalm is well known to me, that mind is exceedingly wonderful, and very astonishing; because whatever is so past, and whatever is to come of after ages, is no more concealed from Him than was it hidden from me when singing that psalm, what and how much of it had been sung from the beginning, what and how much remained to the end. But far be it that You, the Creator of the universe, the Creator of souls and bodies,—far be it that You should know all things future and past [in this way]. Far, far more wonderfully, and far more mysteriously, You know them. For it is not as the feelings of one singing known things, or hearing a known song, are—through expectation of future words, and in remembrance of those that are past—varied, and his senses divided, that anything happens to You, unchangeably eternal, that is, the truly eternal Creator of minds.

As, then, You in the Beginning knew the heaven and the earth without any change of Your knowledge, so in the Beginning did You make heaven and earth without any distraction of Your action. Let him who understands confess to You; and let him who understands not, confess to You. Oh, how exalted are You, and yet the humble in heart are Your dwelling-place; for You raise up those that are bowed down, and those whose exaltation You are do not fall.

Reading Notes

1. This reading contains Confessions XI.23–31, completing the eleventh book. Augustine’s Latin distentio is represented by the historical translation’s language of extension or distraction; the editorial introduction identifies the related image of stretching without imposing a single modern technical meaning.

2. In XI.31 the phrase “in this way” is supplied in brackets to make explicit the comparison with remembering a familiar psalm. Augustine is distinguishing divine knowledge from successive human knowledge, not denying divine knowledge of the past and future.

PART V

Evil, Freedom, and Grace

The account of evil developed in these readings begins with the goodness of created existence. A damaged thing remains something, and whatever remains of its nature retains a measure of goodness. Augustine therefore asks readers to distinguish the existence of a being from the defect that injures it. This distinction gives his argument against evil as an independent substance its force. It also raises difficult questions about ignorance, error, deception, and the responsibility of the person who acts.

The later readings move from the character of evil to the possibility of a good will. Augustine maintains both that people are addressed as responsible agents and that the good they accomplish depends on divine grace. These propositions are developed through biblical interpretation, particularly his reading of Paul. His account includes claims that many readers will find demanding: the dependence of faith itself on God's gift, the insufficiency of unaided human effort, and the divine initiative preceding an individual's response.

The selections preserve the progression of the source arguments. The first reading uses the compact chapters of the Enchiridion. The second and third follow substantial continuous sequences from On Grace and Free Will. The final passage includes Augustine's own description of an earlier position he came to reject. Readers can thus consider both the coherence he sought and the questions his changing explanation leaves open.

CHAPTER 13

Evil and the Good

Augustine's argument begins by asking what a Christian needs to know about the world. His answer gives priority to the goodness of its Creator and to the causes of moral good and evil. That priority reflects the religious purpose of the Enchiridion, a handbook written for Laurentius. It should be read as Augustine's ordering of the knowledge required for a faithful life, rather than as a survey of everything worth investigating.

The central claim concerns the relationship between being and goodness. If evil were a substance in its own right, the Creator's responsibility for existence would appear to include responsibility for an independently existing evil nature. Augustine instead treats evil as a defect within a nature that remains good insofar as it exists. Disease depends on a living body that can be damaged; corruption presupposes something capable of losing its good condition. Complete destruction would remove the damaged subject and its defect together.

The selected sequence continues into questions of error and lying. Augustine distinguishes false belief from deliberate deception, and he considers why errors differ in their consequences. The examples show him moving from metaphysical claims to the decisions of ordinary life. His condemnation of lying is stringent, including situations in which deception seems useful or protective. Keeping these chapters together allows the reader to follow his reasoning through its practical consequences and to judge the transitions between his claims about nature, truth, and moral responsibility.

Augustine

Created Goodness, Evil, and Error

Enchiridion · Chapters 9–23

When, then, the question is asked what we are to believe in regard to religion, it is not necessary to probe into the nature of things, as was done by those whom the Greeks call physici; nor need we be in alarm lest the Christian should be ignorant of the force and number of the elements,—the motion, and order, and eclipses of the heavenly bodies; the form of the heavens; the species and the natures of animals, plants, stones, fountains, rivers, mountains; about chronology and distances; the signs of coming storms; and a thousand other things which those philosophers either have found out, or think they have found out. For even these men themselves, endowed though they are with so much genius, burning with zeal, abounding in leisure, tracking some things by the aid of human conjecture, searching into others with the aids of history and

experience, have not found out all things; and even their boasted discoveries are more often mere guesses than certain knowledge. It is enough for the Christian to believe that the only cause of all created things, whether heavenly or earthly, whether visible or invisible, is the goodness of the Creator the one true God; and that nothing exists but Himself that does not derive its existence from Him; and that He is the Trinity—namely, the Father, and the Son begotten of the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeding from the same Father, but one and the same Spirit of Father and Son.

By the Trinity, thus supremely and equally and unchangeably good, all things were created; and these are not supremely and equally and unchangeably good, but yet they are good, even taken separately. Taken as a whole, however, they are very good, because their ensemble constitutes the universe in all its wonderful order and beauty.

And in the universe, even that which is called evil, when it is regulated and put in its own place, only enhances our admiration of the good; for we enjoy and value the good more when we compare it with the evil. For the Almighty God, who, as even the heathen acknowledge, has supreme power over all things, being Himself supremely good, would never permit the existence of anything evil among His works, if He were not so omnipotent and good that He can bring good even out of evil. For what is that which we call evil but the absence of good? In the bodies of animals, disease and wounds mean nothing but the absence of health; for when a cure is effected, that does not mean that the evils which were present—namely, the diseases and wounds—go away from the body and dwell elsewhere: they altogether cease to exist; for the wound or disease is not a substance, but a defect in the fleshly substance,—the flesh itself being a substance, and therefore something good, of which those evils—that is, privations of the good which we call health—are accidents. Just in the same way, what are called vices in the soul are nothing but privations of natural good. And when they are cured, they are not transferred elsewhere: when they cease to exist in the healthy soul, they cannot exist anywhere else.

All things that exist, therefore, seeing that the Creator of them all is supremely good, are themselves good. But because they are not, like their Creator, supremely and unchangeably good, their good may be diminished and increased. But for good to be diminished is an evil, although, however much it may be diminished, it is necessary, if the being is to continue, that some good should remain to constitute the being. For however small or of whatever kind the being may be, the good which makes it a being cannot be destroyed without destroying the being itself. An uncorrupted nature is justly held in esteem. But if, still further, it be incorruptible, it is undoubtedly considered of still higher value. When it is corrupted, however, its corruption is an evil, because it is deprived of some sort of good. For if it be deprived of no good, it receives no injury; but it

does receive injury, therefore it is deprived of good. Therefore, so long as a being is in process of corruption, there is in it some good of which it is being deprived; and if a part of the being should remain which cannot be corrupted, this will certainly be an incorruptible being, and accordingly the process of corruption will result in the manifestation of this great good.

But if it does not cease to be corrupted, neither can it cease to possess good of which corruption may deprive it. But if it should be thoroughly and completely consumed by corruption, there will then be no good left, because there will be no being. Therefore corruption can consume the good only by consuming the being. Every being, therefore, is a good; a great good, if it can not be corrupted; a little good, if it can: but in any case, only the foolish or ignorant will deny that it is a good. And if it be wholly consumed by corruption, then the corruption itself must cease to exist, as there is no being left in which it can dwell.

Accordingly, there is nothing of what we call evil, if there be nothing good. But a good which is wholly without evil is a perfect good. A good, on the other hand, which contains evil is a faulty or imperfect good; and there can be no evil where there is no good. From all this we arrive at the curious result: that since every being, so far as it is a being, is good, when we say that a faulty being is an evil being, we just seem to say that what is good is evil, and that nothing but what is good can be evil, seeing that every being is good, and that no evil can exist except in a being. Nothing, then, can be evil except something which is good. And although this, when stated, seems to be a contradiction, yet the strictness of reasoning leaves us no escape from the conclusion. We must, however, beware of incurring the prophetic condemnation: “Woe to them that call evil good, and good evil: that put darkness for light, and light for darkness: that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.” And yet our Lord says: “An evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth that which is evil.” Now, what is evil man but an evil being? for a man is a being.

Now, if a man is a good thing because he is a being, what is an evil man but an evil good? Yet, when we accurately distinguish these two things, we find that it is not because he is a man that he is an evil, or because he is wicked that he is a good; but that he is a good because he is a man, and an evil because he is wicked. Whoever, then, says, “To be a man is an evil,” or, “To be wicked is a good,” falls under the prophetic denunciation: “Woe to them that call evil good, and good evil!” For he condemns the work of God, which is the man, and praises the defect of man, which is the wickedness. Therefore every being, even if it be a defective one, in so far as it is a being is good, and in so far as it is defective is evil.

Accordingly, in the case of these contraries which we call good and evil, the rule of the logicians, that two contraries cannot be predicated at the same time of the same thing, does not hold. No weather is at the same time dark and

bright: no food or drink is at the same time sweet and bitter: no body is at the same time and in the same place black and white: none is at the same time and in the same place deformed and beautiful. And this rule is found to hold in regard to many, indeed nearly all, contraries, that they cannot exist at the same time in any one thing. But although no one can doubt that good and evil are contraries, not only can they exist at the same time, but evil cannot exist without good, or in anything that is not good. Good, however, can exist without evil. For a man or an angel can exist without being wicked; but nothing can be wicked except a man or an angel: and so far as he is a man or an angel, he is good; so far as he is wicked, he is an evil.

And these two contraries are so far co-existent, that if good did not exist in what is evil, neither could evil exist; because corruption could not have either a place to dwell in, or a source to spring from, if there were nothing that could be corrupted; and nothing can be corrupted except what is good, for corruption is nothing else but the destruction of good. From what is good, then, evils arose, and except in what is good they do not exist; nor was there any other source from which any evil nature could arise. For if there were, then, in so far as this was a being, it was certainly a good: and a being which was incorruptible would be a great good; and even one which was corruptible must be to some extent a good, for only by corrupting what was good in it could corruption do it harm.

But when we say that evil springs out of good, let it not be thought that this contradicts our Lord’s saying: “A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit.” For, as He who is the Truth says, you cannot gather grapes of thorns, because grapes do not grow on thorns. But we see that on good soil both vines and thorns may be grown. And in the same way, just as an evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit, so an evil will cannot produce good works. But from the nature of man, which is good, may spring either a good or an evil will. And certainly there was at first no source from which an evil will could spring, except the nature of angel or of man, which was good. And our Lord Himself clearly shows this in the very same place where He speaks about the tree and its fruit. For He says: “Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt,”—clearly enough warning us that evil fruits do not grow on a good tree, nor good fruits on an evil tree; but that nevertheless the ground itself, by which He meant those whom He was then addressing, might grow either kind of trees.

Now, in view of these considerations, when we are pleased with that line of Maro, “Happy the man who has attained to the knowledge of the causes of things,” we should not suppose that it is necessary to happiness to know the causes of the great physical convulsions, causes which lie hid in the most secret recesses of nature’s kingdom, “from where comes the earthquake whose force makes the deep seas to swell and burst their barriers, and again to return upon themselves and settle down.” But we ought to know the causes of good and evil

as far as man may in this life know them, in order to avoid the mistakes and troubles of which this life is so full. For our aim must always be to reach that state of happiness in which no trouble shall distress us, and no error mislead us. If we must know the causes of physical convulsions, there are none which it concerns us more to know than those which affect our own health. But seeing that, in our ignorance of these, we are gladly to resort to physicians, it would seem that we might bear with considerable patience our ignorance of the secrets that lie hid in the earth and heavens.

For although we ought with the greatest possible care to avoid error, not only in great but even in little things, and although we cannot err except through ignorance, it does not follow that, if a man is ignorant of a thing, he must forthwith fall into error. That is rather the fate of the man who thinks he knows what he does not know. For he accepts what is false as if it were true, and that is the essence of error. But it is a point of very great importance what the subject is in regard to which a man makes a mistake. For on one and the same subject we rightly prefer an instructed man to an ignorant one, and a man who is not in error to one who is. In the case of different subjects, however,—that is, when one man knows one thing, and another a different thing, and when what the former knows is useful, and what the latter knows is not so useful, or is actually hurtful, —who would not, in regard to the things the latter knows, prefer the ignorance of the former to the knowledge of the latter?

For there are points on which ignorance is better than knowledge. And in the same way, it has sometimes been an advantage to depart from the right way,—in traveling, however, not in morals. It has happened to myself to take the wrong road where two ways met, so that I did not pass by the place where an armed band of Donatists lay in wait for me. Yet I arrived at the place to where I was bent, though by a roundabout route; and when I heard of the ambush, I congratulated myself on my mistake, and gave thanks to God for it. Now, who would not rather be the traveler who made a mistake like this, than the highwayman who made no mistake? And hence, perhaps, it is that the prince of poets puts these words into the mouth of a lover in misery: “How I am undone, how I have been carried away by an evil error!” for there is an error which is good, as it not merely does no harm, but produces some actual advantage.

But when we look more closely into the nature of truth, and consider that to err is just to take the false for the true, and the true for the false, or to hold what is certain as uncertain, and what is uncertain as certain, and that error in the soul is hideous and repulsive just in proportion as it appears fair and plausible when we utter it, or assent to it, saying, “Yes, yes; No, no,”—surely this life that we live is wretched indeed, if only on this account, that sometimes, in order to preserve it, it is necessary to fall into error. God forbid that such should be that other life, where truth itself is the life of the soul, where no one deceives, and no

one is deceived. But here men deceive and are deceived, and they are more to be pitied when they lead others astray than when they are themselves led astray by putting trust in liars. Yet so much does a rational soul shrink from what is false, and so earnestly does it struggle against error, that even those who love to deceive are most unwilling to be deceived.

For the liar does not think that he errs, but that he leads another who trusts him into error. And certainly he does not err in regard to the matter about which he lies, if he himself knows the truth; but he is deceived in this, that he thinks his lie does him no harm, whereas every sin is more hurtful to the sinner than to the sinned against.

But here arises a very difficult and very intricate question, about which I once wrote a large book, finding it necessary to give it an answer. The question is this: whether at any time it can become the duty of a good man to tell a lie? For some go so far as to contend that there are occasions on which it is a good and pious work to commit perjury even, and to say what is false about matters that relate to the worship of God, and about the very nature of God Himself. To me, however, it seems certain that every lie is a sin, though it makes a great difference with what intention and on what subject one lies. For the sin of the man who tells a lie to help another is not so heinous as that of the man who tells a lie to injure another; and the man who by his lying puts a traveler on the wrong road, does not do so much harm as the man who by false or misleading representations distorts the whole course of a life.

No one, of course, is to be condemned as a liar who says what is false, believing it to be true, because such an one does not consciously deceive, but rather is himself deceived. And, on the same principle, a man is not to be accused of lying, though he may sometimes be open to the charge of rashness, if through carelessness he takes up what is false and holds it as true; but, on the other hand, the man who says what is true, believing it to be false, is, so far as his own consciousness is concerned, a liar. For in saying what he does not believe, he says what to his own conscience is false, even though it should in fact be true; nor is the man in any sense free from lying who with his mouth speaks the truth without knowing it, but in his heart wills to tell a lie. And, therefore, not looking at the matter spoken of, but solely at the intention of the speaker, the man who unwittingly says what is false, thinking all the time that it is true, is a better man than the one who unwittingly says what is true, but in his conscience intends to deceive.

For the former does not think one thing and say another; but the latter, though his statements may be true in fact, has one thought in his heart and another on his lips: and that is the very essence of lying. But when we come to consider truth and falsehood in respect to the subjects spoken of, the point on which one deceives or is deceived becomes a matter of the utmost importance.

For although, as far as a man's own conscience is concerned, it is a greater evil to deceive than to be deceived, nevertheless it is a far less evil to tell a lie in regard to matters that do not relate to religion, than to be led into error in regard to matters the knowledge and belief of which are essential to the right worship of God. To illustrate this by example: suppose that one man should say of some one who is dead that he is still alive, knowing this to be untrue; and that another man should, being deceived, believe that Christ shall at the end of some time (make the time as long as you please) die; would it not be incomparably better to lie like the former, than to be deceived like the latter? and would it not be a much less evil to lead some man into the former error, than to be led by any man into the latter?

In some things, then, it is a great evil to be deceived; in some it is a small evil; in some no evil at all; and in some it is an actual advantage. It is to his grievous injury that a man is deceived when he does not believe what leads to eternal life, or believes what leads to eternal death. It is a small evil for a man to be deceived, when, by taking falsehood for truth, he brings upon himself temporal annoyances; for the patience of the believer will turn even these to a good use, as when, for example, taking a bad man for a good, he receives injury from him. But one who believes a bad man to be good, and yet suffers no injury, is nothing the worse for being deceived, nor does he fall under the prophetic denunciation: "Woe to those who call evil good!" For we are to understand that this is spoken not about evil men, but about the things that make men evil.

Hence the man who calls adultery good, falls justly under that prophetic denunciation. But the man who calls the adulterer good, thinking him to be chaste, and not knowing him to be an adulterer, falls into no error in regard to the nature of good and evil, but only makes a mistake as to the secrets of human conduct. He calls the man good on the ground of believing him to be what is undoubtedly good; he calls the adulterer evil, and the pure man good; and he calls this man good, not knowing him to be an adulterer, but believing him to be pure. Further, if by making a mistake one escape death, as I have said above once happened to me, one even derives some advantage from one's mistake. But when I assert that in certain cases a man may be deceived without any injury to himself, or even with some advantage to himself, I do not mean that the mistake in itself is no evil, or is in any sense a good; I refer only to the evil that is avoided, or the advantage that is gained, through making the mistake.

For the mistake, considered in itself, is an evil: a great evil if it concern a great matter, a small evil if it concern a small matter, but yet always an evil. For who that is of sound mind can deny that it is an evil to receive what is false as if it were true, and to reject what is true as if it were false, or to hold what is uncertain as certain, and what is certain as uncertain? But it is one thing to think a man good when he is really bad, which is a mistake; it is another thing to

suffer no ulterior injury in consequence of the mistake, supposing that the bad man whom we think good inflicts no damage upon us. In the same way, it is one thing to think that we are on the right road when we are not; it is another thing when this mistake of ours, which is an evil, leads to some good, such as saving us from an ambush of wicked men.

I am not sure whether mistakes such as the following,—when one forms a good opinion of a bad man, not knowing what sort of man he is; or when, instead of the ordinary perceptions through the bodily senses, other appearances of a similar kind present themselves, which we perceive in the spirit, but think we perceive in the body, or perceive in the body, but think we perceive in the spirit (such a mistake as the Apostle Peter made when the angel suddenly freed him from his chains and imprisonment, and he thought he saw a vision); or when, in the case of sensible objects themselves, we mistake rough for smooth, or bitter for sweet, or think that putrid matter has a good smell; or when we mistake the passing of a carriage for thunder; or mistake one man for another, the two being very much alike, as often happens in the case of twins (hence our great poet calls it “a mistake pleasing to parents”),—whether these, and other mistakes of this kind, ought to be called sins.

Nor do I now undertake to solve a very knotty question, which perplexed those very acute thinkers, the Academic philosophers: whether a wise man ought to give his assent to anything, seeing that he may fall into error by assenting to falsehood: for all things, as they assert, are either unknown or uncertain. Now I wrote three volumes shortly after my conversion, to remove out of my way the objections which lie, as it were, on the very threshold of faith. And assuredly it was necessary at the very outset to remove this utter despair of reaching truth, which seems to be strengthened by the arguments of these philosophers. Now in their eyes every error is regarded as a sin, and they think that error can only be avoided by entirely suspending belief. For they say that the man who assents to what is uncertain falls into error; and they strive by the most acute, but most audacious arguments, to show that, even though a man’s opinion should by chance be true, yet that there is no certainty of its truth, owing to the impossibility of distinguishing truth from falsehood.

But with us, “the just shall live by faith.” Now, if assent be taken away, faith goes too; for without assent there can be no belief. And there are truths, whether we know them or not, which must be believed if we would attain to a happy life, that is, to eternal life. But I am not sure whether one ought to argue with men who not only do not know that there is an eternal life before them, but do not know whether they are living at the present moment; no, say that they do not know what it is impossible they can be ignorant of. For it is impossible that any one should be ignorant that he is alive, seeing that if he be not alive it is impossible for him to be ignorant; for not knowledge merely, but ignorance too,

can be an attribute only of the living. But, forsooth, they think that by not acknowledging that they are alive they avoid error, when even their very error proves that they are alive, since one who is not alive cannot err. As, then, it is not only true, but certain, that we are alive, so there are many other things both true and certain; and God forbid that it should ever be called wisdom, and not the height of folly, to refuse assent to these.

But as to those matters in regard to which our belief or disbelief, and indeed their truth or supposed truth or falsity, are of no importance whatever, so far as attaining the kingdom of God is concerned: to make a mistake in such matters is not to be looked on as a sin, or at least as a very small and trifling sin. In short, a mistake in matters of this kind, whatever its nature and magnitude, does not relate to the way of approach to God, which is the faith of Christ that “works by love.” For the “mistake pleasing to parents” in the case of the twin children was no deviation from this way; nor did the Apostle Peter deviate from this way, when, thinking that he saw a vision, he so mistook one thing for another, that, till the angel who delivered him had departed from him, he did not distinguish the real objects among which he was moving from the visionary objects of a dream; nor did the patriarch Jacob deviate from this way, when he believed that his son, who was really alive, had been slain by a beast.

In the case of these and other false impressions of the same kind, we are indeed deceived, but our faith in God remains secure. We go astray, but we do not leave the way that leads us to Him. But yet these errors, though they are not sinful, are to be reckoned among the evils of this life which is so far made subject to vanity, that we receive what is false as if it were true, reject what is true as if it were false, and cling to what is uncertain as if it were certain. And although they do not trench upon that true and certain faith through which we reach eternal blessedness, yet they have much to do with that misery in which we are now living. And assuredly, if we were now in the enjoyment of the true and perfect happiness that lies before us, we should not be subject to any deception through any sense, whether of body or of mind.

But every lie must be called a sin, because not only when a man knows the truth, but even when, as a man may be, he is mistaken and deceived, it is his duty to say what he thinks in his heart, whether it be true, or whether he only think it to be true. But every liar says the opposite of what he thinks in his heart, with purpose to deceive. Now it is evident that speech was given to man, not that men might with it deceive one another, but that one man might make known his thoughts to another. To use speech, then, for the purpose of deception, and not for its appointed end, is a sin. Nor are we to suppose that there is any lie that is not a sin, because it is sometimes possible, by telling a lie, to do service to another. For it is possible to do this by theft also, as when we steal from a rich

man who never feels the loss, to give to a poor man who is sensibly benefited by what he gets.

And the same can be said of adultery also, when, for instance, some woman appears likely to die of love unless we consent to her wishes, while if she lived she might purify herself by repentance; but yet no one will assert that on this account such an adultery is not a sin. And if we justly place so high a value upon chastity, what offense have we taken at truth, that, while no prospect of advantage to another will lead us to violate the former by adultery, we should be ready to violate the latter by lying? It cannot be denied that they have attained a very high standard of goodness who never lie except to save a man from injury; but in the case of men who have reached this standard, it is not the deceit, but their good intention, that is justly praised, and sometimes even rewarded. It is quite enough that the deception should be pardoned, without its being made an object of laudation, especially among the heirs of the new covenant, to whom it is said: “Let your communication be, Yes, yes; No, no: for whatever is more than these comes of evil.” And it is on account of this evil, which never ceases to creep in while we retain this mortal vesture, that the co-heirs of Christ themselves say, “Forgive us our debts.”

As it is right that we should know the causes of good and evil, so much of them at least as will suffice for the way that leads us to the kingdom, where there will be life without the shadow of death, truth without any alloy of error, and happiness unbroken by any sorrow, I have discussed these subjects with the brevity which my limited space demanded. And I think there cannot now be any doubt, that the only cause of any good that we enjoy is the goodness of God, and that the only cause of evil is the falling away from the unchangeable good of a being made good but changeable, first in the case of an angel, and afterwards in the case of man.

Reading Notes

1. This selection reproduces a continuous sequence of complete source chapters. The source identifies this work as a handbook on faith, hope, and love.

2. Physici means investigators of nature or natural philosophers. Privation means the loss or absence of a good belonging to a nature. In the discussion of substance and its accidents, accident means a condition or attribute of a thing, not a chance event.

CHAPTER 14

Freedom and the Divided Will

On Grace and Free Will addresses a dispute within a Christian community whose members were uncertain whether the defense of grace abolished meaningful human choice. Augustine introduces the work with a request for patience, prayer, and peace among people who do not yet understand the question in the same way. The disagreement is therefore an occasion for both doctrinal argument and an examination of how that argument should be conducted.

The chapters collected here establish the two commitments that Augustine intends to hold together. Commands, warnings, exhortations, and rebukes address people as capable of willing and acting. They would lose their practical meaning if responsibility were simply removed. At the same time, prayers for strength, fidelity, and protection from temptation express dependence on assistance that the person does not produce alone. Augustine reads these different forms of biblical speech as complementary evidence.

The discussion differs from the personal narrative of a divided will in the Confessions. Here the division is approached through the relation between a commanded good and the help required to accomplish it. Augustine's examples include sexual self-restraint, marriage, temptation, and the obligation to return to God. Their range is important: grace is presented as active within the choices of ordinary conduct, as well as in an account of salvation. Readers can assess his position most clearly by following the sequence of texts and inferences through which he argues for responsibility and dependence together.

Augustine

Responsibility and the Need for Help

On Grace and Free Will · Chapters 1–11

With reference to those persons who so preach and defend man’s free will, as boldly to deny, and endeavor to do away with, the grace of God which calls us to Him, and delivers us from our evil deserts, and by which we obtain the good deserts which lead to everlasting life: we have already said a good deal in discussion, and committed it to writing, so far as the Lord has graciously enabled us. But since there are some persons who so defend God’s grace as to deny man’s free will, or who suppose that free will is denied when grace is defended, I have determined to write somewhat on this point to your Love, my brother Valentinus, and the rest of you, who are serving God together under the impulse of a mutual love. For it has been told me concerning you, brothers, by some members of your brotherhood who have visited us, and are the bearers of

this communication of ours to you, that there are dissensions among you on this subject.

This, then, being the case, dearly beloved, that you be not disturbed by the obscurity of this question, I counsel you first to thank God for such things as you understand; but as for all which is beyond the reach of your mind, pray for understanding from the Lord, observing, at the same time peace and love among yourselves; and until He Himself lead you to perceive what at present is beyond your comprehension, walk firmly on the ground of which you are sure. This is the advice of the Apostle Paul, who, after saying that he was not yet perfect, a little later adds, “Let us, therefore, as many as are perfect, be thus minded,”—meaning perfect to a certain extent, but not having attained to a perfection sufficient for us; and then immediately adds, “And if, in any thing, you be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to whatever point we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule.” For by walking in what we have attained, we shall be able to advance to what we have not yet attained,—God revealing it to us if in anything we are otherwise minded,—provided we do not give up what He has already revealed.

Now He has revealed to us, through His Holy Scriptures, that there is in a man a free choice of will. But how He has revealed this I do not recount in human language, but in divine. There is, to begin with, the fact that God’s precepts themselves would be of no use to a man unless he had free choice of will, so that by performing them he might obtain the promised rewards. For they are given that no one might be able to plead the excuse of ignorance, as the Lord says concerning the Jews in the gospel: “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin.” Of what sin does He speak but of that great one which He foreknew, while speaking thus, that they would make their own—that is, the death they were going to inflict upon Him? For they did not have “no sin” before Christ came to them in the flesh.

The apostle also says: “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold back the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God has showed it to them. For the invisible things of Him are from the creation of the world clearly seen—being understood by the things that are made—even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are inexcusable.” In what sense does he pronounce them to be “inexcusable,” except with reference to such excuse as human pride is apt to allege in such words as, “If I had only known, I would have done it; did I not fail to do it because I was ignorant of it?” or, “I would do it if I knew how; but I do not know, therefore I do not do it”? All such excuse is removed from them when the precept is given them, or the knowledge is made manifest to them how to avoid sin.

There are, however, persons who attempt to find excuse for themselves even from God. The Apostle James says to such: “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempts He any man. But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then, when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death.” Solomon, too, in his book of Proverbs, has this answer for such as wish to find an excuse for themselves from God Himself: “The folly of a man spoils his ways; but he blames God in his heart.” And in the book of Ecclesiasticus we read: “Say not you, It is through the Lord that I fell away; for you ought not to do the things that He hates: nor do you say, He has caused me to err; for He has no need of the sinful man. The Lord hates all abomination, and they that fear God love it not.

He Himself made man from the beginning, and left him in the hand of His counsel. If you be willing, you shall keep His commandments, and perform true fidelity. He has set fire and water before you: stretch forth your hand to whether you will. Before man is life and death, and whichsoever pleases him shall be given to him.” Observe how very plainly is set before our view the free choice of the human will.

What is the import of the fact that in so many passages God requires all His commandments to be kept and fulfilled? How does He make this requisition, if there is no free will? What means “the happy man,” of whom the Psalmist says that “his will has been the law of the Lord”? Does he not clearly enough show that a man by his own will takes his stand in the law of God? Then again, there are so many commandments which in some way are expressly adapted to the human will; for instance, there is, “Be not overcome of evil,” and others of similar import, such as, “Be not like a horse or a mule, which have no understanding;” and, “Reject not the counsels of your mother;” and, “Be not wise in your own conceit;” and, “Despise not the chastening of the Lord;” and, “Forget not my law;” and, “Forbear not to do good to the poor;” and, “Devise not evil against your friend;” and, “Give no heed to a worthless woman;” and, “He is not inclined to understand how to do good;” and, “They refused to attend to my counsel;” with numberless other passages of the inspired Scriptures of the Old Testament.

And what do they all show us but the free choice of the human will? So, again, in the evangelical and apostolic books of the New Testament what other lesson is taught us? As when it is said, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth;” and, “Fear not them which kill the body;” and, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself;” and again, “Peace on earth to men of good will.” So also that the Apostle Paul says: “Let him do what he wills; he sins not if he marry. Nevertheless, he that stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but has power over his own will, and has so decreed in his heart that he will keep his

virgin, does well." And so again, "If I do this willingly, I have a reward;" while in another passage he says, "Be you sober and righteous, and sin not;" and again, "As you have a readiness to will, so also let there be a prompt performance;" then he remarks to Timothy about the younger widows, "When they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they choose to marry." So in another passage, "All that will to live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution;" while to Timothy himself he says, "Neglect not the gift that is in you." Then to Philemon he addresses this explanation: "That your benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but of your own will." Servants also he advises to obey their masters "with a good will." In strict accordance with this, James says: "Do not err, my beloved brothers . . . and have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ with respect to persons;" and, "Do not speak evil one of another." So also John in his Epistle writes, "Do not love the world," and other things of the same import.

Now wherever it is said, "Do not do this," and "Do not do that," and wherever there is any requirement in the divine admonitions for the work of the will to do anything, or to refrain from doing anything, there is at once a sufficient proof of free will. No man, therefore, when he sins, can in his heart blame God for it, but every man must impute the fault to himself. Nor does it detract at all from a man's own will when he performs any act in accordance with God. Indeed, a work is then to be pronounced a good one when a person does it willingly; then, too, may the reward of a good work be hoped for from Him concerning whom it is written, "He shall reward every man according to his works."

The excuse such as men are in the habit of alleging from ignorance is taken away from those persons who know God's commandments. But neither will those be without punishment who know not the law of God. "For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law." Now the apostle does not appear to me to have said this as if he meant that they would have to suffer something worse who in their sins are ignorant of the law than they who know it. [III.] It is seemingly worse, no doubt, "to perish" than "to be judged;" but inasmuch as he was speaking of the Gentiles and of the Jews when he used these words, because the former were without the law, but the latter had received the law, who can venture to say that the Jews who sin in the law will not perish, since they refused to believe in Christ, when it was of them that the apostle said, "They shall be judged by the law"?

For without faith in Christ no man can be delivered; and therefore they will be so judged that they perish. If, indeed, the condition of those who are ignorant of the law of God is worse than the condition of those who know it, how can that be true which the Lord says in the gospel: "The servant who knows not his lord's will, and commits things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes; whereas the servant who knows his lord's will, and commits things worthy of

stripes, shall be beaten with many stripes”? Observe how clearly He here shows that it is a graver matter for a man to sin with knowledge than in ignorance. And yet we must not on this account betake ourselves for refuge to the shades of ignorance, with the view of finding our excuse in it. It is one thing to be ignorant, and another thing to be unwilling to know. For the will is at fault in the case of the man of whom it is said, “He is not inclined to understand, so as to do good.” But even the ignorance, which is not theirs who refuse to know, but theirs who are, as it were, simply ignorant, does not so far excuse any one as to exempt him from the punishment of eternal fire, though his failure to believe has been the result of his not having at all heard what he should believe; but probably only so far as to mitigate his punishment.

For it was not said without reason: “Pour out Your wrath upon the heathen that have not known You;” nor again according to what the apostle says: “When He shall come from heaven in a flame of fire to take vengeance on them that know not God.” But yet in order that we may have that knowledge that will prevent our saying, each one of us, “I did not know,” “I did not hear,” “I did not understand;” the human will is summoned, in such words as these: “Wish not to be as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding;” although it may show itself even worse, of which it is written, “A stubborn servant will not be reproved by words; for even if he understand, yet he will not obey.” But when a man says, “I cannot do what I am commanded, because I am mastered by my concupiscence,” he has no longer any excuse to plead from ignorance, nor reason to blame God in his heart, but he recognizes and laments his own evil in himself; and still to such an one the apostle says: “Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good;” and of course the very fact that the injunction, “Consent not to be overcome,” is addressed to him, undoubtedly summons the determination of his will. For to consent and to refuse are functions proper to will.

It is, however, to be feared lest all these and similar testimonies of Holy Scripture (and undoubtedly there are a great many of them), in the maintenance of free will, be understood in such a way as to leave no room for God’s assistance and grace in leading a godly life and a good conversation, to which the eternal reward is due; and lest poor wretched man, when he leads a good life and performs good works (or rather thinks that he leads a good life and performs good works), should dare to glory in himself and not in the Lord, and to put his hope of righteous living in himself alone; so as to be followed by the prophet Jeremiah’s malediction when he says, “Cursed is the man who has hope in man, and makes strong the flesh of his arm, and whose heart departs from the Lord.” Understand, my brothers, I pray you, this passage of the prophet. Because the prophet did not say, “Cursed is the man who has hope in his own self,” it might

seem to some that the passage, “Cursed is the man who has hope in man,” was spoken to prevent man having hope in any other man but himself.

In order, therefore, to show that his admonition to man was not to have hope in himself, after saying, “Cursed is the man who has hope in man,” he immediately added, “And makes strong the flesh of his arm.” He used the word “arm” to designate power in operation. By the term “flesh,” however, must be understood human frailty. And therefore he makes strong the flesh of his arm who supposes that a power which is frail and weak (that is, human) is sufficient for him to perform good works, and therefore puts not his hope in God for help. This is the reason why he subjoined the further clause, “And whose heart departs from the Lord.” Of this character is the Pelagian heresy, which is not an ancient one, but has only lately come into existence. Against this system of error there was first a good deal of discussion; then, as the ultimate resource, it was referred to sundry episcopal councils, the proceedings of which, not, indeed, in every instance, but in some, I have despatched to you for your perusal.

In order, then, to our performance of good works, let us not have hope in man, making strong the flesh of our arm; nor let our heart ever depart from the Lord, but let it say to him, “Be You my helper; forsake me not, nor despise me, O God of my salvation.”

Therefore, my dearly beloved, as we have now proved by our former testimonies from Holy Scripture that there is in man a free determination of will for living rightly and acting rightly; so now let us see what are the divine testimonies concerning the grace of God, without which we are not able to do any good thing. And first of all, I will say something about the very profession which you make in your brotherhood. Now your society, in which you are leading lives of continence, could not hold together unless you despised conjugal pleasure. Well, the Lord was one day conversing on this very topic, when His disciples remarked to Him, “If such be the case of a man with his wife, it is not good to marry.” He then answered them, “All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given.” And was it not to Timothy’s free will that the apostle appealed, when he exhorted him in these words: “Keep yourself continent”? He also explained the power of the will in this matter when He said, “Having no necessity, but possessing power over his own will, to keep his virgin.” And yet “all men do not receive this saying, except those to whom the power is given.” Now they to whom this is not given either are unwilling or do not fulfill what they will; whereas they to whom it is given so will as to accomplish what they will.

In order, therefore, that this saying, which is not received by all men, may yet be received by some, there are both the gift of God and free will.

It is concerning conjugal chastity itself that the apostle treats, when he says, “Let him do what he will, he sins not if he marry;” and yet this too is God’s gift,

for the Scripture says, “It is by the Lord that the woman is joined to her husband.” Accordingly the teacher of the Gentiles, in one of his discourses, commends both conjugal chastity, by which adulteries are prevented, and the still more perfect continence which foregoes all cohabitation, and shows how both one and the other are severally the gift of God. Writing to the Corinthians, he admonished married persons not to defraud each other; and then, after his admonition to these, he added: “But I could wish that all men were even as I am myself,”—meaning, of course, that he abstained from all cohabitation; and then proceeded to say: “But every man has his own gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that.” Now, do the many precepts which are written in the law of God, forbidding all fornication and adultery, indicate anything else than free will?

Surely such precepts would not be given unless a man had a will of his own, with which to obey the divine commandments. And yet it is God’s gift which is indispensable for the observance of the precepts of chastity. Accordingly, it is said in the Book of Wisdom: “When I knew that no one could be continent, except God gives it, then this became a point of wisdom to know whose gift it was.” “Every man,” however, “is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed” not to observe and keep these holy precepts of chastity. If he should say in respect of these commandments, “I wish to keep them, but am mastered by my concupiscence,” then the Scripture responds to his free will, as I have already said: “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” In order, however, that this victory may be gained, grace renders its help; and were not this help given, then the law would be nothing but the strength of sin.

For concupiscence is increased and receives greater energies from the prohibition of the law, unless the spirit of grace helps. This explains the statement of the great Teacher of the Gentiles, when he says, “The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.” See, then, I pray you, from where originates this confession of weakness, when a man says, “I desire to keep what the law commands, but am overcome by the strength of my concupiscence.” And when his will is addressed, and it is said, “Be not overcome of evil,” of what avail is anything but the help of God’s grace to the accomplishment of the precept? This the apostle himself afterwards stated; for after saying “The strength of sin is the law,” he immediately subjoined, “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.” It follows, then, that the victory in which sin is vanquished is nothing else than the gift of God, who in this contest helps free will.

Therefore, our Heavenly Master also says: “Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation.” Let every man, therefore, when fighting against his own concupiscence, pray that he enter not into temptation; that is, that he be not drawn aside and enticed by it. But he does not enter into temptation if he

conquers his evil concupiscence by good will. And yet the determination of the human will is insufficient, unless the Lord grant it victory in answer to prayer that it enter not into temptation. What, indeed, affords clearer evidence of the grace of God than the acceptance of prayer in any petition? If our Savior had only said, “Watch that you enter not into temptation,” He would appear to have done nothing further than admonish man’s will; but since He added the words, “and pray,” He showed that God helps us not to enter into temptation. It is to the free will of man that the words are addressed: “My son, remove not yourself from the chastening of the Lord.” And the Lord said: “I have prayed for you, Peter, that your faith fail not.” So that a man is assisted by grace, in order that his will may not be uselessly commanded.

When God says, “Turn you to me, and I will turn to you,” one of these clauses —that which invites our return to God—evidently belongs to our will; while the other, which promises His return to us, belongs to His grace. Here, possibly, the Pelagians think they have a justification for their opinion which they so prominently advance, that God’s grace is given according to our merits. In the East, indeed, that is to say, in the province of Palestine, in which is the city of Jerusalem, Pelagius, when examined in person by the bishop, did not venture to affirm this. For it happened that among the objections which were brought up against him, this in particular was objected, that he maintained that the grace of God was given according to our merits,—an opinion which was so diverse from catholic doctrine, and so hostile to the grace of Christ, that unless he had anathematized it, as laid to his charge, he himself must have been anathematized on its account. He pronounced, indeed, the required anathema upon the dogma, but how insincerely his later books plainly show; for in them he maintains absolutely no other opinion than that the grace of God is given according to our merits.

Such passages do they collect out of the Scriptures,—like the one which I just now quoted, “Turn you to me, and I will turn to you,”—as if it were owing to the merit of our turning to God that His grace were given us, in which He Himself even turns to us. Now the persons who hold this opinion fail to observe that, unless our turning to God were itself God’s gift, it would not be said to Him in prayer, “Turn us again, O God of hosts;” and, “You, O God, will turn and quicken us;” and again, “Turn us, O God of our salvation,”—with other passages of similar import, too numerous to mention here. For, with respect to our coming to Christ, what else does it mean than our being turned to Him by believing? And yet He says: “No man can come to me, except it were given to him of my Father.”

Then, again, there is the Scripture contained in the second book of the Chronicles: “The Lord is with you when you are with Him: and if you shall seek Him you shall find Him; but if you forsake Him, He also will forsake you.” This

passage, no doubt, clearly manifests the choice of the will. But they who maintain that God’s grace is given according to our merits, receive these testimonies of Scripture in such a manner as to believe that our merit lies in the circumstance of our “being with God,” while His grace is given according to this merit, so that He too may be with us. In like manner, that our merit lies in the fact of “our seeking God,” and then His grace is given according to this merit, in order that we may find Him.” Again, there is a passage in the first book of the same Chronicles which declares the choice of the will: “And you, Solomon, my son, know you the God of your father, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind, for the Lord searches all hearts, and understands all the imaginations of the thoughts; if you seek Him, He will be found of you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off for ever.” But these people find some room for human merit in the clause, “If you seek Him,” and then the grace is thought to be given according to this merit in what is said in the ensuing words, “He will be found of you.” And so they labor with all their might to show that God’s grace is given according to our merits,—in other words, that grace is not grace.

For, as the apostle most expressly says, to them who receive reward according to merit “the recompense is not reckoned of grace but of debt.”

Reading Notes

1. The translator provides two chapter-numbering systems in some headings. This edition follows the consecutive Arabic chapter numbers printed in the historical English translation.

CHAPTER 15

Grace and Human Responsibility

The next sequence continues Augustine's argument by asking how actions performed through grace can nevertheless receive a reward. His answer is that God's gifts make possible the good conduct that God subsequently rewards. He applies this reasoning to Paul's account of his own life, to the persistence of faith, and to the relation between belief and works. The tension is not concealed: eternal life is described as both a recompense and a gift.

These passages also prevent a simple equation between Augustine's emphasis on grace and indifference toward conduct. He explicitly denies that faith without a life of love and good works is sufficient. Yet he locates the source of that transformed life in divine action. The reader is asked to distinguish the reality of a person's willing and doing from the claim that the person independently originates every condition of that willing and doing.

The final selection, from On the Predestination of the Saints, supplies an unusually direct account of Augustine's development. He remembers having assigned the beginning of faith to the individual, while attributing subsequent help to God. He then explains why he came to regard that initial distinction as mistaken. His testimony makes the historical dimension of the argument visible. Augustine is defending a position reached through revision of his own understanding, and he invites opponents to consider the same possibility of correction. The passage should be read alongside his insistence that the good will genuinely acts, so that both sides of the difficulty remain present.

Augustine

Merit, Faith, Works, and the Gift of Life

On Grace and Free Will · Chapters 12–21

Now there was, no doubt, a decided merit in the Apostle Paul, but it was an evil one, while he persecuted the Church, and he says of it: “I am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God.” And it was while he had this evil merit that a good one was rendered to him instead of the evil; and, therefore, he went on at once to say, “But by the grace of God I am what I am.” Then, in order to exhibit also his free will, he added in the next clause, “And His grace within me was not in vain, but I have labored more abundantly than they all.” This free will of man he appeals to in the case of others also, as when he says to them, “We beseech you that you do not receive the grace of God in vain.” Now, how could he so enjoin them, if they received God’s grace in such a manner as to lose their own will?

Nevertheless, lest the will itself should be deemed capable of doing any good thing without the grace of God, after saying, “His grace within me was not in vain, but I have labored more abundantly than they all,” he immediately added the qualifying clause, “Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.” In other words, Not I alone, but the grace of God with me. And thus, neither was it the grace of God alone, nor was it he himself alone, but it was the grace of God with him. For his call, however, from heaven and his conversion by that great and most effectual call, God’s grace was alone, because his merits, though great, were yet evil. Then, to quote one passage more, he says to Timothy: “But be you a co-laborer with the gospel, according to the power of God, who saves us and calls us with His holy calling,—not according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus.” Then, elsewhere, he enumerates his merits, and gives us this description of their evil character: “For we ourselves also were formerly foolish, unbelieving, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.” Nothing, to be sure, but punishment was due to such a course of evil desert!

God, however, who returns good for evil by His grace, which is not given according to our merits, enabled the apostle to conclude his statement and say: “But when the kindness and love of our Savior God shone upon us,—not of works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the laver of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He shed upon us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior; that, being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

From these and similar passages of Scripture, we gather the proof that God’s grace is not given according to our merits. The truth is, we see that it is given not only where there are no good, but even where there are many evil merits preceding: and we see it so given daily. But it is plain that when it has been given, also our good merits begin to be,—yet only by means of it; for, were that only to withdraw itself, man falls, not raised up, but precipitated by free will. Therefore no man ought, even when he begins to possess good merits, to attribute them to himself, but to God, who is thus addressed by the Psalmist: “Be You my helper, forsake me not.” By saying, “Forsake me not,” he shows that if he were to be forsaken, he is unable of himself to do any good thing. Therefore also he says: “I said in my abundance, I shall never be moved,” for he thought that he had such an abundance of good to call his own that he would not be moved.

But in order that he might be taught whose that was, of which he had begun to boast as if it were his own, he was admonished by the gradual desertion of God’s grace, and says: “O Lord, in Your good pleasure You did add strength to my beauty. You did, however, turn away Your face, and then I was troubled and distressed.” Thus, it is necessary for a man that he should be not only justified

when unrighteous by the grace of God,—that is, be changed from unholiness to righteousness,—when he is requited with good for his evil; but that, even after he has become justified by faith, grace should accompany him on his way, and he should lean upon it, lest he fall. On this account it is written concerning the Church herself in the book of Canticles: “Who is this that comes up in white raiment, leaning upon her kinsman?” Made white is she who by herself alone could not be white. And by whom has she been made white except by Him who says by the prophet, “Though your sins be as purple, I will make them white as snow”?

At the time, then, that she was made white, she deserved nothing good; but now that she is made white, she walks well;—but it is only by her continuing ever to lean upon Him by whom she was made white. Therefore, Jesus Himself, on whom she leans that was made white, said to His disciples, “Without me you can do nothing.”

Let us return now to the Apostle Paul, who, as we have found, obtained God’s grace, who recompenses good for evil, without any good merits of his own, but rather with many evil merits. Let us see what he says when his final sufferings were approaching, writing to Timothy: “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith.” He enumerates these as, of course, now his good merits; so that, as after his evil merits he obtained grace, so now, after his good merits, he might receive the crown. Observe, therefore, what follows: “There is from now on laid up for me,” he says, “a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day.” Now, to whom should the righteous Judge award the crown, except to him on whom the merciful Father had bestowed grace? And how could the crown be one “of righteousness,” unless the grace had preceded which “justifies the ungodly”? How, moreover, could these things now be awarded as of debt, unless the other had been before given as a free gift?

When, however, the Pelagians say that the only grace which is not given according to our merits is that by which his sins are forgiven to man, but that that which is given in the end, that is, eternal life, is rendered to our preceding merits: they must not be allowed to go without an answer. If, indeed, they so understand our merits as to acknowledge them, too, to be the gifts of God, then their opinion would not deserve reprobation. But inasmuch as they so preach human merits as to declare that a man has them of his own self, then most rightly the apostle replies: “Who makes you to differ from another? And what have you, that you did not receive? Now, if you did receive it, why do you glory as if you had not received it?” To a man who holds such views, it is perfect truth to say: It is His own gifts that God crowns, not your merits,—if, at least, your merits are of your own self, not of Him.

If, indeed, they are such, they are evil; and God does not crown them; but if they are good, they are God's gifts, because, as the Apostle James says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights." In accordance with which John also, the Lord's forerunner, declares: "A man can do not receivehing except it be given him from heaven"—from heaven, of course, because from there came also the Holy Spirit, when Jesus ascended up on high, led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men. If, then, your good merits are God's gifts, God does not crown your merits as your merits, but as His own gifts.

Let us, therefore, consider those very merits of the Apostle Paul which he said the Righteous Judge would recompense with the crown of righteousness; and let us see whether these merits of his were really his own—I mean, whether they were obtained by him of himself, or were the gifts of God. "I have fought," says he, "the good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith." Now, in the first place, these good works were nothing, unless they had been preceded by good thoughts. Observe, therefore, what he says concerning these very thoughts. His words, when writing to the Corinthians, are: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God." Then let us look at each several merit. "I have fought the good fight." Well, now, I want to know by what power he fought. Was it by a power which he possessed of himself, or by strength given to him from above? It is impossible to suppose that so great a teacher as the apostle was ignorant of the law of God, which proclaims the following in Deuteronomy: "Say not in your heart, My own strength and energy of hand has worked for me this great power; but you shall remember the Lord your God, how it is He that gives you strength to acquire such power." And what avails "the good fight," unless followed by victory?

And who gives the victory but He of whom the apostle says himself, "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"? Then, in another passage, having quoted from the Psalm these words: "Because for Your sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for slaughter," he went on to declare: "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us." Not by ourselves, therefore, is the victory accomplished, but by Him who has loved us. In the second clause he says, "I have finished my course." Now, who is it that says this, but he who declares in another passage, "So then it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy." And this sentence can by no means be transposed, so that it could be said: It is not of God, who shows mercy, but of the man who wills and runs. If any person be bold enough to express the matter thus, he shows himself most plainly to be at issue with the apostle.

His last clause runs thus: "I have kept the faith." But he who says this is the same who declares in another passage, "I have obtained mercy that I might be

faithful." He does not say, "I obtained mercy because I was faithful," but "in order that I might be faithful," thus showing that even faith itself cannot be had without God's mercy, and that it is the gift of God. This he very expressly teaches us when he says, "For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." They might possibly say, "We received grace because we believed;" as if they would attribute the faith to themselves, and the grace to God. Therefore, the apostle having said, "You are saved through faith," added," And that not of yourselves, but it is the gift of God." And again, lest they should say they deserved so great a gift by their works, he immediately added, "Not of works, lest any man should boast." Not that he denied good works, or emptied them of their value, when he says that God renders to every man according to his works; but because works proceed from faith, and not faith from works. Therefore it is from Him that we have works of righteousness, from whom comes also faith itself, concerning which it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

Unintelligent persons, however, with regard to the apostle's statement: "We conclude that a man is justified by faith without the works of the law," have thought him to mean that faith suffices to a man, even if he lead a bad life, and has no good works. Impossible is it that such a character should be deemed "a vessel of election" by the apostle, who, after declaring that "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision," adds at once, "but faith which works by love." It is such faith which severs God's faithful from unclean demons,—for even these "believe and tremble," as the Apostle James says; but they do not do well. Therefore they possess not the faith by which the just man lives,—the faith which works by love in such wise, that God recompenses it according to its works with eternal life. But inasmuch as we have even our good works from God, from whom likewise comes our faith and our love, therefore the selfsame great teacher of the Gentiles has designated "eternal life" itself as His gracious "gift."

And hence there arises no small question, which must be solved by the Lord's gift. If eternal life is rendered to good works, as the Scripture most openly declares: "Then He shall reward every man according to his works:" how can eternal life be a matter of grace, seeing that grace is not rendered to works, but is given gratuitously, as the apostle himself tells us: "To him that works is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt;" and again: "There is a remnant saved according to the election of grace;" with these words immediately subjoined: "And if of grace, then is it no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace"? How, then, is eternal life by grace, when it is received from works? Does the apostle perhaps not say that eternal life is a grace? No, he has so called it, with a clearness which none can possibly gainsay. It requires no acute intellect, but only an attentive reader, to discover this. For after saying, "The

wages of sin is death," he at once added, "The grace of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

This question, then, seems to me to be by no means capable of solution, unless we understand that even those good works of ours, which are recompensed with eternal life, belong to the grace of God, because of what is said by the Lord Jesus: "Without me you can do nothing." And the apostle himself, after saying, "By grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast;" saw, of course, the possibility that men would think from this statement that good works are not necessary to those who believe, but that faith alone suffices for them; and again, the possibility of men's boasting of their good works, as if they were of themselves capable of performing them. To meet, therefore, these opinions on both sides, he immediately added, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them." What is the purport of his saying, "Not of works, lest any man should boast," while commending the grace of God?

And then why does he afterwards, when giving a reason for using such words, say, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works"? Why, therefore, does it run, "Not of works, lest any man should boast"? Now, hear and understand. "Not of works" is spoken of the works which you suppose have their origin in yourself alone; but you have to think of works for which God has molded (that is, has formed and created) you. For of these he says, "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works." Now he does not here speak of that creation which made us human beings, but of that in reference to which one said who was already in full manhood, "Create in me a clean heart, O God;" concerning which also the apostle says, "Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; look, all things are become new. And all things are of God." We are framed, therefore, that is, formed and created, "in the good works which" we have not ourselves prepared, but "God has before ordained that we should walk in them." It follows, then, dearly beloved, beyond all doubt, that as your good life is nothing else than God's grace, so also the eternal life which is the recompense of a good life is the grace of God; moreover it is given gratuitously, even as that is given gratuitously to which it is given.

But that to which it is given is solely and simply grace; this therefore is also that which is given to it, because it is its reward;—grace is for grace, as if remuneration for righteousness; in order that it may be true, because it is true, that God "shall reward every man according to his works."

Perhaps you ask whether we ever read in the Sacred Scriptures of "grace for grace." Well you possess the Gospel according to John, which is perfectly clear in its very great light. Here John the Baptist says of Christ: "Of His fullness have

we all received, even grace for grace." So that out of His fullness we have received, according to our humble measure, our particles of ability as it were for leading good lives—"according as God has dealt to every man his measure of faith;" because "every man has his proper gift of God; one after this manner, and another after that." And this is grace. But, over and above this, we shall also receive "grace for grace," when we shall have awarded to us eternal life, of which the apostle said: "The grace of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord," having just said that "the wages of sin is death." Deservedly did he call it "wages," because everlasting death is awarded as its proper due to diabolical service.

Now, when it was in his power to say, and rightly to say: "But the wages of righteousness is eternal life," he yet preferred to say: "The grace of God is eternal life;" in order that we may hence understand that God does not, for any merits of our own, but from His own divine compassion, prolong our existence to everlasting life. Even as the Psalmist says to his soul, "Who crowns you with mercy and compassion." Well, now, is not a crown given as the reward of good deeds? It is, however, only because He works good works in good men, of whom it is said, "It is God which works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure," that the Psalm has it, as just now quoted: "He crowns you with mercy and compassion," since it is through His mercy that we perform the good deeds to which the crown is awarded. It is not, however, to be for a moment supposed, because he said, "It is God that works in you both to will and to do of his own good pleasure," that free will is taken away.

If this, indeed, had been his meaning, he would not have said just before, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." For when the command is given "to work," their free will is addressed; and when it is added, "with fear and trembling," they are warned against boasting of their good deeds as if they were their own, by attributing to themselves the performance of anything good. It is pretty much as if the apostle had this question put to him: "Why did you use the phrase, 'with fear and trembling'?" And as if he answered the inquiry of his examiners by telling them, "For it is God which works in you." Because if you fear and tremble, you do not boast of your good works—as if they were your own, since it is God who works within you.

Thinking with Assent and Revising a Former View

On the Predestination of the Saints · Chapters 5–8

And, therefore, commending that grace which is not given according to any merits, but is the cause of all good merits, he says, "Not that we are sufficient to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God." Let them give attention to this, and well weigh these words, who think that the beginning of faith is of ourselves, and the supplement of faith is of God. For who cannot see

that thinking is prior to believing? For no one believes anything unless he has first thought that it is to be believed. For however suddenly, however rapidly, some thoughts fly before the will to believe, and this presently follows in such wise as to attend them, as it were, in closest conjunction, it is yet necessary that everything which is believed should be believed after thought has preceded; although even belief itself is nothing else than to think with assent. For it is not every one who thinks that believes, since many think in order that they may not believe; but everybody who believes, thinks,—both thinks in believing and believes in thinking.

Therefore in what pertains to religion and piety (of which the apostle was speaking), if we are not capable of thinking anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God, we are certainly not capable of believing anything as of ourselves, since we cannot do this without thinking; but our sufficiency, by which we begin to believe, is of God. Therefore, as no one is sufficient for himself, for the beginning or the completion of any good work whatever,—and this those brothers of yours, as what you have written intimates, already agree to be true, so that, both in the beginning as in the carrying out of every good work, our sufficiency is of God,—so no one is sufficient for himself, either to begin or to perfect faith; but our sufficiency is of God. Because if faith is not a matter of thought, it is of no account; and we are not sufficient to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God.

Care must be taken, brothers, beloved of God, that a man do not lift himself up in opposition to God, when he says that he does what God has promised. Was not the faith of the nations promised to Abraham, “and he, giving glory to God, most fully believed that what He promised He is able also to perform”? He therefore makes the faith of the nations, who is able to do what He has promised. Further, if God works our faith, acting in a wonderful manner in our hearts so that we believe, is there any reason to fear that He cannot do the whole; and does man on that account arrogate to himself its first elements, that he may merit to receive its last from God? Consider if in such a way any other result be gained than that the grace of God is given in some way or other, according to our merit, and so grace is no more grace. For on this principle it is rendered as debt, it is not given gratuitously; for it is due to the believer that his faith itself should be increased by the Lord, and that the increased faith should be the wages of the faith begun; nor is it observed when this is said, that this wage is assigned to believers, not of grace, but of debt.

And I do not at all see why the whole should not be attributed to man,—as he who could originate for himself what he had not previously, can himself increase what he had originated,—except that it is impossible to withstand the most manifest divine testimony by which faith, from where piety takes its beginning, is shown also to be the gift of God: such as is that testimony that “God has dealt

to every man the measure of faith;" and that one, "Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ," and other similar passages. Man, therefore, unwilling to resist such clear testimonies as these, and yet desiring himself to have the merit of believing, compounds as it were with God to claim a portion of faith for himself, and to leave a portion for Him; and, what is still more arrogant, he takes the first portion for himself and gives the subsequent to Him; and so in that which he says belongs to both, he makes himself the first, and God the second!

It was not thus that that pious and humble teacher thought—I speak of the most blessed Cyprian—when he said "that we must boast in nothing, since nothing is our own." And in order to show this, he appealed to the apostle as a witness, where he said, "For what have you that you have not received? And if you have received it, why boast you as if you had not received it?" And it was chiefly by this testimony that I myself also was convinced when I was in a similar error, thinking that faith by which we believe on God is not God's gift, but that it is in us from ourselves, and that by it we obtain the gifts of God, by which we may live temperately and righteously and piously in this world. For I did not think that faith was preceded by God's grace, so that by its means would be given to us what we might profitably ask, except that we could not believe if the proclamation of the truth did not precede; but that we should consent when the gospel was preached to us I thought was our own doing, and came to us from ourselves.

And this my error is sufficiently indicated in some small works of mine written before my episcopate. Among these is that which you have mentioned in your letters in which is an exposition of certain propositions from the Epistle to the Romans. Eventually, when I was retracting all my small works, and was committing that retractation to writing, of which task I had already completed two books before I had taken up your more lengthy letters,—when in the first volume I had reached the retractation of this book, I then spoke thus:—"Also discussing, I say, 'what God could have chosen in him who was as yet unborn, whom He said that the elder should serve; and what in the same elder, equally as yet unborn, He could have rejected; concerning whom, on this account, the prophetic testimony is recorded, although declared long subsequently, "Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated,"' I carried out my reasoning to the point of saying: 'God did not therefore choose the works of any one in foreknowledge of what He Himself would give them, but he chose the faith, in the foreknowledge that He would choose that very person whom He foreknew would believe on Him,—to whom He would give the Holy Spirit, so that by doing good works he might obtain eternal life also.' I had not yet very carefully sought, nor had I as yet found, what is the nature of the election of grace, of which the apostle says, 'A remnant are saved according to the election of grace.' Which assuredly is not

grace if any merits precede it; lest what is now given, not according to grace, but according to debt, be rather paid to merits than freely given.

And what I next subjoined: ‘For the same apostle says, “The same God which works all in all;” but it was never said, God believes all in all;’ and then added, ‘Therefore what we believe is our own, but what good thing we do is of Him who gives the Holy Spirit to them that believe:’ I certainly could not have said, had I already known that faith itself also is found among those gifts of God which are given by the same Spirit. Both, therefore, are ours on account of the choice of the will, and yet both are given by the spirit of faith and love. For faith is not alone but as it is written, ‘Love with faith, from God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ.’ And what I said a little after, ‘For it is ours to believe and to will, but it is His to give to those who believe and will, the power of doing good works through the Holy Spirit, by whom love is shed abroad in our hearts,’—is true indeed; but by the same rule both are also God’s, because God prepares the will; and both are ours too, because they are only brought about with our good wills.

And thus what I subsequently said also: ‘Because we are not able to will unless we are called; and when, after our calling, we would will, our willing is not sufficiently nor our running, unless God gives strength to us that run, and leads us to where He calls us;’ and thereupon added: ‘It is plain, therefore, that it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy, that we do good works’—this is absolutely most true. But I discovered little concerning the calling itself, which is according to God’s purpose; for not such is the calling of all that are called, but only of the elect. Therefore what I said a little afterwards: ‘For as in those whom God elects it is not works but faith that begins the merit so as to do good works by the gift of God, so in those whom He condemns, unbelief and impiety begin the merit of punishment, so that even by way of punishment itself they do evil works’—I spoke most truly.

But that even the merit itself of faith was God’s gift, I neither thought of inquiring into, nor did I say. And in another place I say: ‘For whom He has mercy upon, He makes to do good works, and whom He hardens He leaves to do evil works; but that mercy is bestowed upon the preceding merit of faith, and that hardening is applied to preceding iniquity.’ And this indeed is true; but it should further have been asked, whether even the merit of faith does not come from God’s mercy,—that is, whether that mercy is manifested in man only because he is a believer, or whether it is also manifested that he may be a believer? For we read in the apostle’s words: ‘I obtained mercy to be a believer.’ He does not say, ‘Because I was a believer.’ Therefore although it is given to the believer, yet it has been given also that he may be a believer. Therefore also, in another place in the same book I most truly said: ‘Because, if it is of God’s mercy, and not of works, that we are even called that we may believe and it is granted to us who believe to do good works, that mercy must not be grudged to the heathen;’—

although I there discoursed less carefully about that calling which is given according to God's purpose."

You see plainly what was at that time my opinion concerning faith and works, although I was laboring in commending God's grace; and in this opinion I see that those brothers of ours now are, because they have not been as careful to make progress with me in my writings as they were in reading them. For if they had been so careful, they would have found that question solved in accordance with the truth of the divine Scriptures in the first book of the two which I wrote in the very beginning of my episcopate to Simplicianus, of blessed memory, Bishop of the Church of Milan, and successor to St. Ambrose. Unless, perhaps, they may not have known these books; in which case, take care that they do know them. Of this first of those two books, I first spoke in the second book of the Retractations; and what I said is as follows: "Of the books, I say, on which, as a bishop, I have labored, the first two are addressed to Simplicianus, president of the Church of Milan, who succeeded the most blessed Ambrose, concerning divers questions, two of which I gathered into the first book from the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans.

The former of them is about what is written: 'What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? By no means;' as far as the passage where he says, 'Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? The grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.' And in it I have expounded those words of the apostle: 'The law is spiritual; but I am carnal,' and others in which the flesh is declared to be in conflict against the Spirit in such a way as if a man were there described as still under law, and not yet established under grace. For, long afterwards, I perceived that those words might even be (and probably were) the utterance of a spiritual man. The latter question in this book is gathered from that passage where the apostle says, 'And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one act of intercourse, even by our father Isaac,' as far as that place where he says, 'Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we should be as Sodoma, and should have been like to Gomorrah.' In the solution of this question I labored indeed on behalf of the free choice of the human will, but God's grace overcame, and I could only reach that point where the apostle is perceived to have said with the most evident truth, 'For who makes you to differ? and what have you that you have not received?

Now, if you have received it, why do you glory as if you received it not?' And this the martyr Cyprian was also desirous of setting forth when he compressed the whole of it in that title: 'That we must boast in nothing, since nothing is our own.'" This is why I previously said that it was chiefly by this apostolic testimony that I myself had been convinced, when I thought otherwise concerning this matter; and this God revealed to me as I sought to solve this question when I was writing, as I said, to the Bishop Simplicianus. This testimony, therefore, of

the apostle, when for the sake of repressing man’s conceit he said, “For what have you which you have not received?” does not allow any believer to say, I have faith which I received not. All the arrogance of this answer is absolutely repressed by these apostolic words. Moreover, it cannot even be said, “Although I have not a perfected faith, yet I have its beginning, by which I first of all believed in Christ.” Because here also is answered: “But what have you that you have not received? Now, if you have received it, why do you glory as if you received it not?”

Reading Notes

1. The final reading preserves Augustine’s account of his earlier understanding of the beginning of faith and his later revision. It is a selected passage from a longer treatise, not that treatise in full.

2. Desert in the selected text means what a person has merited, whether good or evil. Augustine distinguishes the reality of a human act from his claim that its good beginning is itself received through grace.

PART VI

Faith Made Visible

The readings in this part ask how belief acquires a recognizable form in a human life. Augustine's preaching on First John brings the language of truth, anointing, love, and antichrist into the experience of a community. The hearer is asked to discern teachers and to examine personal conduct. Membership and profession do not settle the examination in advance.

The selection from On Christian Doctrine moves from the ordering of love to the interpretation of Scripture. The books that instruct a community are read toward a particular end: the love of God and neighbor. Augustine's language also exposes questions that the reader will carry into the following part. Who can recognize a loving intention? How should correction be practiced? What happens when the defense of unity becomes an exercise of power? The primary texts retain the arguments and examples through which he approaches these questions.

CHAPTER 16

Belief and the Life We Lead

Augustine addresses love as an activity through which belief becomes visible. The opening reading places his hearers among competing voices: some speak from the world, some claim to speak from God, and everyone must decide what kind of life those claims produce. His answer repeatedly returns to the love of one's brother or sister. Knowing God involves a relationship that changes the person who claims to know him.

The homily also connects love with the Trinity. Augustine asks how the assertion that love is from God relates to the assertion that God is love. This is a theological argument as well as an exhortation to generosity. The love that joins people to one another is situated within the divine life and within God's prior gift of the Son. Human love answers a love already received.

Outward appearances remain uncertain evidence. An affectionate gesture can conceal a corrupt intention, while correction can proceed from concern for another person's good. Augustine develops this distinction through examples that include physical punishment and religious disagreement. His confidence about discerning loving correction deserves attention alongside his defense of love. Later chapters in this reader examine his acceptance of coercion more directly.

Read the repeated appeals to love together with these demanding examples. The homily proposes an inward root from which actions grow, but it also asks hearers to recognize that root by the life expressed through it. Faith, knowledge, intention, and conduct are drawn into a single examination.

Augustine

Homily VII on First John

Homilies on the First Epistle of John · Homily VII, complete, including its opening Scripture reading (1 John 4:4-12)

“Now you are of God, little children, and have overcome him: because he who is in you is greater than he who is in this world. They are of the world: therefore they speak of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God: whoever knows God hears us; whoever is not of God hears not us. From this know we the spirit of truth, and [the spirit] of error. Dearly, beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and everyone that loves is born of God, and knows God. Whoever loves not knows not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God in us, that God sent His only-begotten Son into this world, that we may live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved, but that He loved us,

and sent His Son to be the Atoner for our sins. Dearly beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man has seen God at any time."

1. So is this world to all the faithful seeking their own country, as was the desert to the people Israel. They wandered indeed as yet, and were seeking their own country: but with God for their guide they could not wander astray. Their way was God's bidding. For where they went about during forty years, the journey itself is made up of a very few stations, and is known to all. They were retarded because they were in training, not because they were forsaken. That therefore which God promises us is ineffable sweetness and a good, as the Scripture says, and as you have often heard by us rehearsed, which "eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man." But by temporal labors we are exercised, and by temptations of this present life are trained. However, if you would not die of thirst in this wilderness, drink love. It is the fountain which God has been pleased to place here that we faint not in the way: and we shall more abundantly drink of it, when we are come to our own land.

The Gospel has just been read; now to speak of the very words with which the lesson ended, what other thing heard you but concerning love? For we have made an agreement with our God in prayer, that if we would that He should forgive us our sins, we also should forgive the sins which may have been committed against us. Now that which forgives is none other than love. Take away love from the heart; hatred possesses it, it knows not how to forgive. Let love be there, and she fearlessly forgives, not being straitened. And this whole epistle which we have undertaken to expound to you, see whether it commends anything else than this one thing, love. Nor need we fear lest by much speaking of it it come to be hateful. For what is there to love, if love come to be hateful? It is by love that other things come to be rightly loved; then how must itself be loved! Let not that then which ought never to depart from the heart, depart from the tongue.

2. "Now," says he, "are you of God little children, and have overcome him:" whom but Antichrist? For above he had said, "Whoever dissolves Jesus Christ and denies that He has come in the flesh is not of God." Now we expounded, if you remember, that all those who violate love deny Jesus Christ to have come in the flesh. For Jesus had no need to come but because of love: as indeed the love we are commending is that which the Lord Himself commends in the Gospel, "Greater love than this can no man have, that a man lay down his life for his friends." How was it possible for the Son of God to lay down His life for us without putting on flesh in which He might die? Whoever therefore violates love, let him say what he will with his tongue, his life denies that Christ is come in the flesh; and this is an antichrist, wherever he may be, wherever he may have entered. But what says the apostle to them who are citizens of that country for which we sigh?

“You have overcome him.” And by which have they overcome? “Because he who is in you is greater than he who is in this world.” Lest they should attribute the victory to their own strength, and by arrogance of pride should be overcome, (for whomever the devil makes proud, he overcomes,) wishing them to keep humility, what says he? “You have overcome him.” Every man now, at hearing this saying, “You have overcome,” lifts up the head, lifts up the neck, wishes himself to be praised. Do not extol yourself; see who it is that in you has overcome. Why have you overcome? “Because he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” Be humble, bear your Lord; be you the beast for Him to sit on. Good is it for you that He should rule, and He guide. For if you have not Him to sit on you, you may lift up the neck, may strike out the heels: but woe to you without a ruler, for this liberty sends you among the wild beasts to be devoured!

3. “These are of the world.” Who? The antichrists. You have already heard who they be. And if you are not such, you know them, but whoever is such, knows not. “These are of the world: therefore they speak of the world, and the world hears them.” Who are those who “speak of the world”? Mark who are against love. Look, you have heard the Lord saying, “If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you also your trespasses. But if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” It is the sentence of Truth: or if it be not Truth that speaks, gainsay it. If you are a Christian and believe Christ, He has said, “I am the truth.” This sentence is true, is firm. Now hear men that “speak of the world.” “And will you not avenge yourself? And will you let him say that he has done this to you? No: let him feel that he has to do with a man.” Every day are such things said, They that say such things, “of the world speak they, and the world hears them.” None say such things but those that love the world, and by none are such things heard but by those who love the world.

And you have heard that to love the world and neglect love is to deny that Jesus came in the flesh. Or say if the Lord Himself in the flesh did that? if, being buffeted, He willed to be avenged? if, hanging on the cross, He did not say, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”? But if He threatened not, who had power; why do you threaten, why are you inflated with anger, who are under power of another? He died because it was His will to die, yet He threatened not; you know not when you shall die, and do you threaten?

4. “We are of God.” Let us see why; see whether it be for any other thing than love. “We are of God: whoever knows God hears us; whoever is not of God hears not us. By this we know the spirit of truth, and of error:” namely by this, that whoever hears us has the spirit of truth; whoever hears not us, has the spirit of error. Let us see what he advises, and let us choose rather to hear him advising in the spirit of truth, and not antichrists, not lovers of the world, not the world. If

we are born of God, “beloved,” he goes on—see above from what: “We are of God: whoever knows God hears us; whoever is not of God hears not us. By this we know the spirit of truth, and of error:” aye, now, he makes us eagerly attentive: to be told that he who knows God, hears; but he who knows not, hears not; and that this is the discerning between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error: well then, let us see what he is about to advise; in what we must hear him —“Beloved, let us love one another.” Why? because a man advises?

“Because love is of God.” Much has he commended love, in that he has said, “Is of God:” but he is going to say more; let us eagerly hear. At present he has said, “Love is of God; and everyone that loves is born of God, and knows God. Whoever loves not knows not God.” Why? “For God is love” [Love is God]. What more could be said, brothers? If nothing were said in praise of love throughout the pages of this epistle, if nothing whatever throughout the other pages of the Scriptures, and this one only thing were all we were told by the voice of the Spirit of God, “For Love is God;” nothing more ought we to require.

5. Now see that to act against love is to act against God. Let no man say, “I sin against man when I do not love my brother, (mark it!) and sin against man is a thing to be taken easily; only let me not sin against God.” How are you not sinning against God, when you sin against love? “Love is God.” Do “we” say this? If we said, “Love is God,” perhaps someone of you might be offended and say, What has he said? What meant he to say, that “Love is God”? God “gave” love, as a gift God bestowed love. “Love is of God: Love IS God.” Look, here have you, brothers, the Scriptures of God: this epistle is canonical; throughout all nations it is recited, it is held by the authority of the whole earth, it has edified the whole earth. You are here told by the Spirit of God, “Love is God.” Now if you dare, go against God, and refuse to love your brother!

6. In what sense then was it said a while ago, “Love is of God;” and now, “Love IS God?” For God is Father and Son and Holy Spirit: the Son, God of God, the Holy Spirit, God of God; and these three, one God, not three Gods. If the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit God, and that person loves in whom dwells the Holy Spirit: therefore “Love is God;” but “IS God,” because “Of God.” For you have both in the epistle; both, “Love is of God,” and, “Love is God.” Of the Father alone the Scripture has it not to say, that He is “of God:” but when you hear that expression, “Of God,” either the Son is meant, or the Holy Spirit. Because while the apostle says, “The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given to us:” let us understand that He who subsists in love is the Holy Spirit. For it is even this Holy Spirit, whom the bad cannot receive, even He is that Fountain of which the Scripture says, “Let the fountain of your water be your own, and let no stranger partake with you.” For all who love not God, are strangers, are antichrists.

And though they come to the churches, they cannot be numbered among the children of God; not to them belongs that Fountain of life. To have baptism is possible even for a bad man; to have prophecy is possible even for a bad man. We find that king Saul had prophecy: he was persecuting holy David, yet was he filled with the spirit of prophecy, and began to prophesy. To receive the sacrament of the body and blood of the Lord is possible even for a bad man: for of such it is said, “Whoever eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks judgment to himself.” To have the name of Christ is possible even for a bad man; i.e. even a bad man can be called a Christian: as they of whom it is said, “They polluted the name of their God.” I say, to have all these sacraments is possible even for a bad man; but to have love, and to be a bad man, is not possible. This then is the peculiar gift, this the “Fountain” that is singly one’s “own.” To drink of this the Spirit of God exhorts you, to drink of Himself the Spirit of God exhorts you.

7. “In this was manifested the love of God in us.” Look, in order that we may love God, we have exhortation. Could we love Him, unless He first loved us? If we were slow to love, let us not be slow to love in return. He first loved us; not even so do we love. He loved the unrighteous, but He did away the unrighteousness: He loved the unrighteous, but not to unrighteousness did He gather them together: He loved the sick, but He visited them to make them whole. “Love,” then, “is God.” “In this was manifested the love of God in us, because that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we may live through Him.” As the Lord Himself says: “Greater love than this can no man have, that a man lay down his life for his friends:” and there was proved the love of Christ towards us, in that He died for us: how is the love of the Father towards us proved? In that He “sent His only Son” to die for us: so also the apostle Paul says: “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how has He not with Him also freely given us all things?” Look, the Father delivered up Christ; Judas delivered Him up; does it not seem as if the thing done were of the same sort?

Judas is “traditor,” one that delivered up, [or, a traitor]: is God the Father that? God forbid! say you. I do not say it, but the apostle says, “He who did not spare His own Son, but “tradidit Eum” delivered Him up for us all.” Both the Father delivered Him up, and He delivered up Himself. The same apostle says: “Who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.” If the Father delivered up the Son; and the Son delivered up Himself, what has Judas done? There was a “traditio” (delivering up) by the Father; there was a “traditio” by the Son; there was a “traditio” by Judas: the thing done is the same, but what is it that distinguishes the Father delivering up the Son, the Son delivering up Himself, and Judas the disciple delivering up his Master? This: that the Father and the Son did it in love, but Judas did this in treacherous betrayal. You see that not

what the man does is the thing to be considered; but with what mind and will he does it.

We find God the Father in the same deed in which we find Judas; the Father we bless, Judas we detest. Why do we bless the Father, and detest Judas? We bless love, detest iniquity. How great a good was conferred upon mankind by the delivering up of Christ! Had Judas this in his thoughts, that therefore he delivered Him up? God had in His thoughts our salvation by which we were redeemed; Judas had in his thoughts the price for which he sold the Lord. The Son Himself had in His thoughts the price He gave for us, Judas in his the price he received to sell Him. The diverse intention therefore makes the things done diverse. Though the thing be one, yet if we measure it by the diverse intentions, we find the one a thing to be loved, the other to be condemned; the one we find a thing to be glorified, the other to be detested. Such is the force of love. See that it alone discriminates, it alone distinguishes the doings of men.

8. This we have said in the case where the things done are similar. In the case where they are diverse, we find a man by love made fierce; and by iniquity made winningly gentle. A father beats a boy, and a child abductor caresses. If you name the two things, blows and caresses, who would not choose the caresses, and decline the blows? If you mark the persons, it is love that beats, iniquity that caresses. See what we are insisting upon; that the deeds of men are only discerned by the root of love. For many things may be done that have a good appearance, and yet proceed not from the root of love. For thorns also have flowers: some actions truly seem rough, seem savage; however they are done for discipline at the bidding of love. Once for all, then, a short precept is given you: Love, and do what you will: whether you hold your peace, through love hold your peace; whether you cry out, through love cry out; whether you correct, through love correct; whether you spare, through love do you spare: let the root of love be within, of this root can nothing spring but what is good.

9. “In this is love—in this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into this world, that we may live through Him.—In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us:” we did not love Him first: for to this end loved He us, that we may love Him: “And sent His Son to be the Atoner for our sins: “litatorem,” i.e. one that sacrifices. He sacrificed for our sins. Where did He find the sacrifice? Where did He find the victim which he would offer pure? Other He found none; His own self He offered. “Beloved, if God so loved us we ought also to love one another. Peter,” says He, “love you me?” And he said, “I love.” “Feed my sheep.”

10. “No man has seen God at any time:” He is a thing invisible; not with the eye but with the heart must He be sought. But just as if we wished to see the sun, we should purge the eye of the body; wishing to see God, let us purge the eye by which God can be seen. Where is this eye? Hear the Gospel: “Blessed are

the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” But let no man imagine God to himself according to the lust of his eyes. For so he makes to himself either a huge form, or a certain incalculable magnitude which, like the light which he sees with the bodily eyes, he makes extend through all directions; field after field of space he gives it all the bigness he can; or, he represents to himself like as it were an old man of venerable form. None of these things do you imagine. There is something you may imagine, if you would see God; “God is love.” What sort of face has love? what form has it? what stature? what feet? what hands has it? no man can say.

And yet it has feet, for these carry men to church: it has hands; for these reach forth to the poor: it has eyes; for by that we consider the needy: “Blessed is the man,” it is said, “who considers the needy and the poor.” It has ears, of which the Lord says, “Whoever has ears to hear let him hear.” These are not members distinct by place, but with the understanding whoever has love sees the whole at once. Inhabit, and you shall be inhabited; dwell, and you shall be dwelt in. For how say you, my brothers? who loves what he does not see? Now why, when love is praised, do you lift up your hands, make acclaim, praise? What have I shown you? What I produced, was it a gleam of colors? What I propounded, was it gold and silver? Have I dug out jewels from hid treasures? What of this sort have I shown to your eyes? Is my face changed while I speak? I am in the flesh; I am in the same form in which I came forth to you; you are in the same form in which you came here: love is praised, and you shout applause.

Certainly you see nothing. But as it pleases you when you praise, so let it please you that you may keep it in your heart. For mark well what I say brothers; I exhort you all, as God enables me, to a great treasure. If there were shown you a beautiful little vase, embossed, inlaid with gold, curiously worked, and it charmed your eyes, and drew towards it the eager desire of your heart, and you were pleased with the hand of the artificer, and the weight of the silver, and the splendor of the metal; would not each one of you say, “O, if I had that vase!” And in vain you would say it, for it would not rest with you to have it. Or if one should wish to have it, he might think of stealing it from another’s house. Love is praised to you; if it please you, have it, possess it: no need that you should rob any man, no need that you should think of buying it; it is to be had freely, without cost.

Take it, clasp it; there is nothing sweeter. If such it be when it is but spoken of, what must it be when one has it?

11. If any of you perhaps wish to keep love, brothers, above all things do not imagine it to be an abject and sluggish thing; nor that love is to be preserved by a sort of gentleness, no not gentleness, but tameness and listlessness. Not so is it preserved. Do not imagine that you then love your servant when you do not beat him, or that you then love your son when you give him not discipline, or

that you then love your neighbor when you do not rebuke him: this is not love, but mere feebleness. Let love be fervent to correct, to amend: but if there be good manners, let them delight you; if bad, let them be amended, let them be corrected. Love not in the man his error, but the man: for the man God made, the error the man himself made. Love that which God made, love not that which the man himself made. When you love that, you take away this: when you esteem that, you correct this. But even if you are severe at any time, let it be because of love, for correction.

For this cause was love betokened by the Dove which descended upon the Lord. That likeness of a dove, the likeness in which came the Holy Spirit, by whom love should be shed forth into us: therefore was this? The dove has no gall: yet with beak and wings she fights for her young; hers is a fierceness without bitterness. And so does also a father; when he chastises his son, for discipline he chastises him. As I said, the kidnapper, in order that he may sell, inveigles the child with bitter endearments; a father, that he may correct, does without gall chastise. Such be you to all men. See here, brothers, a great lesson, a great rule: each one of you has children, or wishes to have; or if he has altogether determined to have no children after the flesh, at least spiritually he desires to have children:—what father does not correct his son? what son does not his father discipline? And yet he seems to be fierce with him. It is the fierceness of love, the fierceness of love: a sort of fierceness without gall after the manner of the dove, not of the raven.

From where it came into my mind, my brothers, to tell you, that those violaters of love are those who have made the schism: as they hate love itself, so they hate also the dove. But the dove convicts them: it comes forth from heaven, the heavens open, and it abides on the head of the Lord. Therefore this? That John may hear, “This is He who baptizes.” Away, you robbers; away, you invaders of the possession of Christ! On your own possessions, where you will needs be lords, you have dared to fix the titles of the great Owner. He recognizes His own titles; He vindicates to Himself His own possession. He does not cancel the titles, but enters in and takes possession. So in one that comes to the Catholic Church, his baptism is not cancelled, that the title of the commander be not cancelled: but what is done in the Catholic Church? The title is acknowledged; the Owner enters in under His own titles, where the robber was entering in under titles not his own.

Reading Notes

1. The Latin caritas is rendered as love in this modernization. The historical English translation often uses charity. In this homily the term concerns love of God and neighbor, rather than only the giving of alms.

2. In section 2, the expression dissolves Jesus Christ reflects the wording of the Latin biblical text Augustine is expounding. It concerns dividing or undoing the confession of Christ; modern biblical translations often present a different wording at this point.

3. Augustine retains demanding examples of correction and punishment. These examples are part of his argument about intention and appearance, and they should be read with the later selections on coercion.

CHAPTER 17

The Many Antichrists

The warning about the last hour leads Augustine into an examination of the Christian community. He takes the appearance of many antichrists seriously as a present condition. The last hour, he explains, can extend over a long period. Its urgency concerns the hearer's growth and fidelity, even when the duration of history remains unknown.

His first application is to division. Those who leave the unity of the Church appear in his interpretation as opponents of Christ. That argument reflects a bishop speaking within the conflicts of his own community. Yet the homily does not allow those who remain within the institution to become complacent. People can receive the same sacraments while failing to belong to Christ in the manner their profession implies. Denial is expressed through deeds as well as through words.

This movement from doctrinal disagreement to the examination of conduct gives the homily its particular force. Augustine asks whether someone who verbally acknowledges Christ can nevertheless live against Christ's teaching. The audience is drawn into the question. Identifying an opponent elsewhere cannot substitute for examining one's own desires and actions.

The final sections also qualify the preacher's role. Augustine speaks, teaches, and urges, but he locates the decisive teacher within the hearer. The outward word and the inward instruction belong together. His claim helps connect this homily with the earlier readings on the human word and the divine Word: speech can summon attention, while understanding must become an inward possession.

Augustine

Homily III on First John

Homilies on the First Epistle of John · Homily III, complete, including its opening Scripture reading (1 John 2:18-27)

“Children, it is the last hour: and as you have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us: if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and know all things. I write to you, not because you know not the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ? [He is antichrist, that denies the Father and the Son.] Whoever denies the Son, the same has neither the Father nor the

Son: and whoever acknowledges the Son has both the Father and the Son. Let that therefore abide in you, which you have heard from the beginning. If that which you have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, you also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.

And this is the promise that He has promised us, even eternal life. These things have I written to you concerning those who seduce you; that you may know that you have an anointing, and that the anointing which you have received of him may abide in you. And you need not that any man teach you; because His anointing teaches you of all things."

1. "Children, it is the last hour." In this lesson he addresses the children that they may hurry to grow, because "it is the last hour." Age or stature of the body is not at one's own will. A man does not grow in respect of the flesh when he will, any more than he is born when he will: but where the being born rests with the will, the growth also rests with the will. No man is "born of water and the Spirit," except he be willing. Consequently if he will, he grows or makes increase: if he will, he decreases. What is it to grow? To go onward by proficiency. What is it to decrease? To go backward by deficiency. Whoever knows that he is born, let him hear that he is an infant; let him eagerly cling to the breasts of his mother, and he grows apace. Now his mother is the Church; and her breasts are the two Testaments of the Divine Scriptures. Hence let him suck the milk of all the things that as signs of spiritual truths were done in time for our eternal salvation, that being nourished and strengthened, he may attain to the eating of solid meat, which is, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Our milk is Christ in His humility; our meat, the selfsame Christ equal with the Father.

With milk He nourishes you, that He may feed you with bread: for with the heart spiritually to touch Christ is to know that He is equal with the Father.

2. Therefore it was that He forbade Mary to touch Him, and said to her, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to the Father." What is this? He gave Himself to be handled by the disciples, and did He shun Mary's touch? Is not He the same that said to the doubting disciple, "Reach here your fingers, and feel the scars"? Was He at that time ascended to the Father? Then why does He forbid Mary, and says, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to the Father?" Or are we to say, that He feared not to be touched by men, and feared to be touched by women? The touch of Him cleanses all flesh. To whom He willed first to be manifested, by them feared He to be handled? Was not His resurrection announced by women to the men, that so the serpent should by a sort of counterplot be overcome? For because he first by the woman announced death to man, therefore to men was also life announced by a woman. Then why was He unwilling to be touched, but because He would have it to be understood of that spiritual touch?

The spiritual touch takes place from a pure heart. That person does of a pure heart reach Christ with his touch who understands Him coequal with the Father. But whoever does not yet understand Christ's Godhead, that person reaches but to the flesh, reaches not to the Godhead. Now what great matter is it, to reach only to that which the persecutors reached to, who crucified Him? But that is the great thing, to understand the Word God with God, in the beginning, by whom all things were made: such as He would have Himself to be known when He said to Philip, "Am I so long time with you, and have you not known me, Philip? Whoever sees me, sees also the Father."

3. But lest any be sluggish to go forward, let him hear: "Children, it is the last hour." Go forward, run, grow; "it is the last hour." This same last hour is long; yet it is the last. For he has put "hour" for "the last time;" because it is in the last times that our Lord Jesus Christ is to come. But some will say, How the last times? how the last hour? Certainly antichrist will first come, and then will come the day of judgment. John perceived these thoughts: lest people should in a manner become secure, and think it was not the last hour because antichrist was to come, he said to them, "And as you have heard that antichrist is to come, now are there come many antichrists." Could it have many antichrists, except it were "the last hour"?

4. Whom has he called antichrists? He goes on and expounds. "By which we know that it is the last hour." By what? Because "many antichrists have come. They went out from us;" see the antichrists! "They went out from us:" therefore we mourn the loss. Hear the consolation. "But they were not of us." All heretics, all schismatics went out from us, that is, they go out from the Church; but they would not go out, if they were of us. Therefore, before they went out they were not of us. If before they went out they were not of us, many are within, are not gone out, but yet are antichrists. We dare to say this: and why, but that each one while he is within may not be an antichrist? For he is about to describe and mark the antichrists, and we shall see them now. And each person ought to question his own conscience, whether he is an antichrist. For antichrist in our tongue means, contrary to Christ. Not, as some take it, that antichrist is to be so called because he is to come ante Christum, before Christ, i.e.

Christ to come after him: it does not mean this, neither is it thus written, but Antichristus, i.e. contrary to Christ. Now who is contrary to Christ you already perceive from the apostle's own exposition, and understand that none can go out but antichrists; whereas those who are not contrary to Christ, can in no way go out. For whoever is not contrary to Christ holds fast in His body, and is counted with it as a member. The members are never contrary one to another. The entire body consists of all the members. And what says the apostle concerning the agreement of the members? "If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; and if one member be glorified, all the members rejoice with it." If then in the

glorifying of a member the other members rejoice with it, and in its suffering all the members suffer, the agreement of the members has no antichrist. And there are those who inwardly are in such a way in the body of our Lord Jesus Christ—seeing His body is yet under cure, and the soundness will not be perfect save in the resurrection of the dead—are in such wise in the body of Christ, as bad humors.

When these are vomited up, the body is relieved: so too when bad men go out, then the Church is relieved. And one says, when the body vomits and casts them out, These humors went out of me, but they were not of me. How were not of me? Were not cut out of my flesh, but oppressed my breast while they were in me.

5. “They went out from us; but,” be not sad, “they were not of us.” How do you prove this? If they had been of us, they would doubtless have continued with us. Hence therefore you may see, that many who are not of us, receive with us the Sacraments, receive with us baptism. receive with us what the faithful know they receive, Benediction, the Eucharist, and whatever there is in Holy Sacraments: the communion of the very altar they receive with us, and are not of us. Temptation proves that they are not of us. When temptation comes to them as if blown by a wind they fly abroad; because they were not grain. But all of them will fly abroad, as we must often tell you, when once the fanning of the Lord’s threshing-floor shall begin in the day of judgment. “They went out from us, but they were not of us; if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us.” For would you know, beloved, how most certain this saying is, that they who perhaps have gone out and return, are not antichrists, are not contrary to Christ?

Whoever are not antichrists, it cannot be that they should continue without. But of his own will is each either an antichrist or in Christ. Either we are among the members, or among the bad humors. Whoever changes himself for the better, is in the body, a member: but whoever continues in his badness, is a bad humor; and when he is gone out, then they who were oppressed will be relieved. “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but (they went out), that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.” That he has added, “that they might be made manifest,” is, because even when they are within they are not of us; yet they are not manifest, but by going out are made manifest. “And you have an anointing from the Holy One, that you may be manifest to your own selves.” The spiritual anointing is the Holy Spirit Himself, of which the Sacrament is in the visible anointing.

Of this anointing of Christ he says, that all who have it know the bad and the good; and they need not to be taught, because the anointing itself teaches them.

6. “I write to you not because you know not the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth.” Look, we are admonished how we may know antichrist. What is Christ? Truth. He himself has said “I am the Truth.” But “no lie is of the truth.” Consequently, all who lie are not yet of Christ. He has not said that some lie is of the truth, and some lie not of the truth. Mark the sentence. Do not fondle yourselves, do not flatter yourselves, do not deceive yourselves, do not cheat yourselves: “No lie is of the truth.” Let us see then how antichrists lie, because there is more than one kind of lying. “Who is a liar, but whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ?” One is the meaning of the word “Jesus,” another the meaning of the word “Christ:” though it be one Jesus Christ our Savior, yet “Jesus” is His proper name. Just as Moses was so called by his proper name, as Elias, as Abraham: so as His proper name our Lord has the name “Jesus:” but “Christ” is the name of His sacred character.

As when we say, Prophet, as when we say, Priest; so by the name Christ we are given to understand the Anointed, in whom should be the redemption of the whole people. The coming of this Christ was hoped for by the people of the Jews: and because He came in lowliness, He was not acknowledged; because the stone was small, they stumbled at it and were broken. But “the stone grew, and became a great mountain;” and what says the Scripture? “Whoever shall stumble at this stone shall be broken; and on whomever this stone shall come, it will grind him to powder.” We must mark the difference of the words: it says, whoever stumbles shall be broken; but he on whom it shall come, shall be ground to powder. At the first, because He came lowly, men stumbled at Him: because He shall come lofty to judgment, on whomever He shall come, He will grind him to powder. But not that man will He grind to powder at His future coming, whom He broke not when He came.

Whoever stumbled not at the lowly, shall not dread the lofty. Briefly you have heard it, brothers: whoever stumbled not at the lowly, shall not dread the lofty. For to all bad men is Christ a stone of stumbling; whatever Christ says is bitter to them.

7. For hear and see. Certainly all who go out from the Church, and are cut off from the unity of the Church, are antichrists; let no man doubt it: for the apostle himself has marked them, “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us.” Therefore, whoever does not continue with us, but go out from us, it is manifest that they are antichrists. And how are they proved to be antichrists? By lying. “And who is a liar, but whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ?” Let us ask the heretics: where do you find a heretic that denies that Jesus is the Christ? See now, my beloved, a great mystery. Mark what the Lord God may have inspired us with, and what I would gladly work into your minds. Look, they went out from us, and turned Donatists: we ask them whether Jesus is the Christ; they instantly confess

that Jesus is the Christ. If then that person is an antichrist, who denies that Jesus is the Christ, neither can they call us antichrists, nor we them; therefore, neither they went out from us, nor we from them.

If then we have not gone out one from another, we are in unity: if we are in unity, what means it that there are two altars in this city? what, that there are divided houses, divided marriages? that there is a common bed, and a divided Christ? He admonishes us, he would have us confess what is the truth:—either they went out from us, or we from them. But let it not be imagined that we have gone out from them. For we have the testament of the Lord's inheritance, we recite it, and there we find, "I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and for Your possessions the ends of the earth." We hold fast Christ's inheritance; they hold it not, for they do not communicate with the whole earth, do not communicate with the universal body redeemed by the blood of the Lord. We have the Lord Himself rising from the dead, who presented Himself to be felt by the hands of the doubting disciples: and while they yet doubted, He said to them, "It was necessary for Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name"—Where? which way? to what persons?—"through all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." Our minds are set at rest concerning the unity of the inheritance!

Whoever does not communicate with this inheritance, is gone out.

8. But let us not be made sad: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us." If then they went out from us, they are antichrists; if they are antichrists, they are liars; if they are liars, they deny that Jesus is the Christ. Once more we come back to the difficulty of the question. Ask them one by one; they confess that Jesus is the Christ. The difficulty that hampers us comes of our taking what is said in the Epistle in too narrow a sense. At any rate you see the question; this question puts both us and them to a stand, if it be not understood. Either we are antichrists, or they are antichrists; they call us antichrists, and say that we went out from them; we say the like of them. But now this epistle has marked out the antichrists by this cognizance: "Whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ," that same "is an antichrist." Now therefore let us inquire who denies; and let us mark not the tongue, but the deeds.

For if all be asked, all with one mouth confess that Jesus is the Christ. Let the tongue keep still for a little while, ask the life. If we shall find this, if the Scripture itself shall tell us that denial is a thing done not only with the tongue, but also with the deeds, then assuredly we find many antichrists, who with the mouth profess Christ, and in their manners dissent from Christ. Where find we this in Scripture? Hear Paul the Apostle; speaking of such, he says, "For they confess that they know God, but in their deeds deny Him." We find these also to be antichrists: whoever in his deeds denies Christ, is an antichrist. I listen not to

what he says, but I observe what life he leads. Works speak, and do we require words? For where is the bad man that does not wish to talk well? But what says the Lord to such? “You hypocrites, how can you speak good things, while you are evil?” Your voices you bring into my ears: I look into your thoughts.

I see an evil will there, and you make a show of false fruits. I know what I must gather, and from where; I do not “gather figs of thistles,” I do not gather “grapes of thorns;” for “every tree is known by its fruit.” A more lying antichrist is he who with his mouth professes that Jesus is the Christ, and with his deeds denies Him. A liar in this, that he speaks one thing, and does another.

9. Now therefore, brothers, if deeds are to be questioned, not only do we find many antichrists gone out; but many not yet manifest, who have not gone out at all. For as many as the Church has within it that are perjured, defrauders, addicted to black arts, consulters of fortune-tellers, adulterers, drunkards, usurers, boy-stealers, and all the other vices that we are not able to enumerate; these things are contrary to the doctrine of Christ, are contrary to the word of God. Now the Word of God is Christ: whatever is contrary to the Word of God is in Antichrist. For Antichrist means, “contrary to Christ.” And would you know how openly these resist Christ? Sometimes it happens that they do some evil, and one begins to reprove them; because they dare not blaspheme Christ, they blaspheme His ministers by whom they are reproved: but if you show them that you speak Christ’s words, not your own, they endeavor all they can to convict you of speaking your own words, not Christ’s: if however it is manifest that you speak Christ’s words, they go even against Christ, they begin to find fault with Christ: “How,” say they, “and why did He make us such as we are?” Do not persons say this every day, when they are convicted of their deeds?

Perverted by a depraved will, they accuse their Maker. Their Maker cries to them from heaven, (for the same made us, who new-made us:) What made I you? I made man, not avarice; I made man, not robbery; I made man, not adultery. You have heard that my works praise me. Out of the mouth of the Three Children, it was the hymn itself that kept them from the fires.” The works of the Lord praise the Lord, the heaven, the earth, the sea, praise Him; praise Him all things that are in the heaven, praise Him angels, praise Him stars, praise Him lights, praise Him whatever swims, whatever flies, whatever walks, whatever creeps; all these praise the Lord. Have you heard there that avarice praises the Lord? Have you heard that drunkenness praises the Lord? That luxury praises, that frivolity praises Him? Whatever you hear not in that hymn give praise to the Lord, the Lord made not that thing. Correct what you have made, that what God made in you may be saved. But if you will not, and love and embrace your sins, you are contrary to Christ.

Be you within, be you without, you are an antichrist; be you within, be you without, you are chaff. But why are you not without? Because you have not fallen in with a wind to carry you away.

10. These things are now manifest, my brothers. Let no man say, I do not worship Christ, but I worship God His Father. “Everyone that denies the Son, has neither the Son nor the Father; and whoever confesses the Son, has both the Son and the Father.” He speaks to you that are grain: and let those who were chaff, hear, and become grain. Let each one, looking well to his own conscience, if he be a lover of the world, be changed; let him become a lover of Christ, that he be not an antichrist. If one shall tell him that he is an antichrist, he is wroth, he thinks it a wrong done to him; perhaps, if he is told by him that strives with him that he is an antichrist, he threatens an action at law. Christ says to him, Be patient; if you have been falsely spoken of, rejoice with me, because I also am falsely spoken of by the antichrists: but if you are truly spoken of, come to an understanding with your own conscience; and if you fear to be called this, fear more to be it.

11. “Let that therefore abide in you, which you have heard from the beginning. If that which you have heard from the beginning shall abide in you, you also shall abide in the Son, and in the Father. And this is the promise that He has promised us.” For perhaps you might ask about the wages, and say, Look, “that which I have heard from the beginning I keep safe in me, I comply with it; perils, labors, temptations, for the sake of this continuance, I bear up against them all: with what fruit? what wages? what will He hereafter give me, since in this world I see that I labor among temptations? I see not here that there is any rest: mere mortality weighs down the soul, and the corruptible body presses it down to lower things: but I bear all things, that “that which I have heard from the beginning” may “remain” in me; and that I may say to my God, “Because of the words of Your lips have I kept hard ways.” To what wages then?

Hear, and faint not. If you were fainting in the labors, upon the promised wages be strong. Where is the man that shall work in a vineyard, and shall let slip out of his heart the reward he is to receive? Suppose him to have forgotten, his hands fail. The remembrance of the promised wages makes him persevering in the work: and yet the one who promised it is a man who can deceive your expectation. How much more strong ought you to be in God’s field, when He who promised is the Truth, Who can neither have any successor, nor die, nor deceive him to whom the promise was made! And what is the promise? Let us see what He has promised. Is it gold which men here love much, or silver? Or possessions, for which men lavish gold, however much they love gold? Or pleasant lands, spacious houses, many slaves, numerous beasts? Not these are the wages, so to say, for which he exhorts us to endure in labor. What are these wages called? “eternal life.” You have heard, and in your joy you have cried out: love that

which you have heard, and you are delivered from your labors into the rest of eternal life.

Look, this is what God promises; “eternal life.” Look, this is what God threatens; eternal fire. What to those set on the right hand? “Come, you blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world.” To those on the left, what? “Go into eternal fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” You do not yet love that: at least fear this.

12. Remember then, my brothers, that Christ has promised us eternal life: “This,” says he, “is the promise which He has promised us, even eternal life. These things have I written to you concerning them which seduce you.” Let none seduce you to death: desire the promise of eternal life. What can the world promise? Let it promise what you will, it makes the promise perhaps to one that tomorrow shall die. And with what face will you go hence to Him that abides forever? “But a powerful man threatens me, so that I must do some evil.” What does he threaten? Prisons, chains, fires, torments, wild beasts: aye, but not eternal fire? Dread that which One Almighty threatens; love that which One Almighty promises; and all the world becomes vile in our regard, whether it promise or terrify. “These things have I written to you concerning them which seduce you; that you may know that you have an anointing, and the anointing which we have received from Him may abide in you.” In the anointing we have the sacramental sign [of a thing unseen], the virtue itself is invisible; the invisible anointing is the Holy Spirit; the invisible anointing is that love, which, in whomever it be, shall be as a root to him: however burning the sun, he cannot wither. All that is rooted is nourished by the sun’s warmth, not withered.

13. “And you have no need that any man teach you, because His anointing teaches you concerning all things.” Then to what purpose is it that “we,” my brothers, teach you? If “His anointing teaches you concerning all things,” it seems we labor without a cause. And what mean we, to cry out as we do? Let us leave you to His anointing, and let His anointing teach you. But this is putting the question only to myself: I put it also to that same apostle: let him deign to hear a babe that asks of him: to John himself I say, Had those the anointing to whom you were speaking? You have said, “His anointing teaches you concerning all things.” To what purpose have you written an Epistle like this? what teaching did “you” give them? what instruction? what edification? See here now, brothers, see a mighty mystery. The sound of our words strikes the ears, the Master is within. Do not suppose that any man learns anything from man. We can admonish by the sound of our voice; if there be not One within that shall teach, vain is the noise we make.

Aye, brothers, have you a mind to know it? Have you not all heard this present discourse? and yet how many will go from this place untaught! I, for my part, have spoken to all; but they to whom that Anointing within speaks not, they

whom the Holy Spirit within teaches not, those go back untaught. The teachings of the master from without are a sort of aids and admonitions. He who teaches the hearts has His chair in heaven. Therefore says He also Himself in the Gospel: “Call no man your master upon earth; One is your Master, even Christ.” Let Him therefore Himself speak to you within, when not one of mankind is there: for though there be someone at your side, there is none in your heart. Yet let there not be none in your heart: let Christ be in your heart: let His anointing be in the heart, lest it be a heart thirsting in the wilderness, and having no fountains to water it. There is then, I say, a Master within that teaches: Christ teaches; His inspiration teaches.

Where His inspiration and His anointing is not, in vain do words make a noise from without. So are the words, brothers, which we speak from without, as is the husbandman to the tree: from without he works, applies water and diligence of culture; let him from without apply what he will, does he form the apples? does he clothe the nakedness of the wood with a shady covering of leaves? does he do anything like this from within? But whose doing is this? Hear the husbandman, the apostle: both see what we are, and hear the Master within: “I have planted, Apollos has watered; but God gave the increase: neither whoever plants is anything, neither whoever waters, but He who gives the increase, even God.” This then we say to you: whether we plant, or whether we water, by speaking we are not anything; but He who gives the increase, even God: that is, “His anointing which teaches you concerning all things.”

Reading Notes

1. Augustine understands the last hour as a prolonged final period of history. His treatment of the term antichrist includes both separation from the Church and conduct contrary to Christ within its visible membership.

2. The Catholic Church in this historical text is the universal Church as Augustine understood its unity. The phrase belongs to his own ecclesial argument and historical setting.

CHAPTER 18

Scripture and the Work of Love

These chapters place the reading of Scripture within an account of ordered love. Augustine begins with a distinction already established earlier in On Christian Doctrine: enjoyment names the final happiness in which desire comes to rest, while use names a relationship that leads toward that happiness. He applies the distinction to human beings, including oneself, one's neighbor, and the body.

The terminology can initially sound instrumental. His argument, however, requires readers to seek another person's good in relation to God and to recognize the shared destination toward which love should move. The practical examples include deciding whom to help when needs exceed one's resources. Questions about affection become questions about action under the conditions of ordinary life.

The argument then reaches Scripture itself. Augustine identifies the love of God and neighbor as the end toward which the commandments and their interpretation should lead. An interpretation that happens to encourage love can still mistake the author's meaning. Such an interpreter should be corrected, because a habit of misreading can eventually produce consequences that the reader did not intend. Fidelity to the text and the formation of love remain connected responsibilities.

The closing chapters distinguish enduring love from the faith and hope appropriate to the present condition. Augustine also considers the person whose life is so formed by these virtues that written instruction no longer occupies its former place. His conclusion returns to the character of the reader: a humble and disciplined heart is part of the work of understanding.

Augustine

Love of God and Neighbor

On Christian Doctrine · Book I, chapters 22-34, complete

20. Among all these things, then, those only are the true objects of enjoyment which we have spoken of as eternal and unchangeable. The rest are for use, that we may be able to arrive at the full enjoyment of the former. We, however, who enjoy and use other things are things ourselves. For a great thing truly is man, made after the image and similitude of God, not as respects the mortal body in which he is clothed, but as respects the rational soul by which he is exalted in honor above the beasts. And so it becomes an important question, whether men ought to enjoy, or to use, themselves, or to do both. For we are commanded to love one another: but it is a question whether man is to be loved by man for his own sake, or for the sake of something else. If it is for his own sake, we enjoy

him; if it is for the sake of something else, we use him. It seems to me, then, that he is to be loved for the sake of something else. For if a thing is to be loved for its own sake, then in the enjoyment of it consists a happy life, the hope of which at least, if not yet the reality, is our comfort in the present time. But a curse is pronounced on him who places his hope in man.

21. Neither ought anyone to have joy in himself, if you look at the matter clearly, because no one ought to love even himself for his own sake, but for the sake of Him who is the true object of enjoyment. For a man is never in so good a state as when his whole life is a journey towards the unchangeable life, and his affections are entirely fixed upon that. If, however, he loves himself for his own sake, he does not look at himself in relation to God, but turns his mind in upon himself, and so is not occupied with anything that is unchangeable. And thus he does not enjoy himself at his best, because he is better when his mind is fully fixed upon, and his affections wrapped up in, the unchangeable good, than when he turns from that to enjoy even himself. Therefore if you ought not to love even yourself for your own sake, but for His in whom your love finds its most worthy object, no other man has a right to be angry if you love him too for God’s sake.

For this is the law of love that has been laid down by Divine authority: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself;” but, “You shall love God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind:” so that you are to concentrate all your thoughts, your whole life and your whole intelligence upon Him from whom you derive all that you bring. For when He says, “With all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind,” He means that no part of our life is to be unoccupied, and to afford room, as it were, for the wish to enjoy some other object, but that whatever else may suggest itself to us as an object worthy of love is to be borne into the same channel in which the whole current of our affections flows. Whoever, then, loves his neighbor aright, ought to urge upon him that he too should love God with his whole heart, and soul, and mind. For in this way, loving his neighbor as himself, a man turns the whole current of his love both for himself and his neighbor into the channel of the love of God, which suffers no stream to be drawn off from itself by whose diversion its own volume would be diminished.

22. Those things which are objects of use are not all, however, to be loved, but those only which are either united with us in a common relation to God, such as a man or an angel, or are so related to us as to need the goodness of God through our instrumentality, such as the body. For assuredly the martyrs did not love the wickedness of their persecutors, although they used it to attain the favor of God. As, then, there are four kinds of things that are to be loved,—first, that which is above us; second, ourselves; third, that which is on a level with us; fourth, that which is beneath us,—no precepts need be given about the second and fourth of these. For, however far a man may fall away from the truth, he still

continues to love himself, and to love his own body. The soul which flies away from the unchangeable Light, the Ruler of all things, does so that it may rule over itself and over its own body; and so it cannot but love both itself and its own body.

23. Moreover, it thinks it has attained something very great if it is able to lord it over its companions, that is, other men. For it is inherent in the sinful soul to desire above all things, and to claim as due to itself, that which is properly due to God only. Now such love of itself is more correctly called hate. For it is not just that it should desire what is beneath it to be obedient to it while itself will not obey its own superior; and most justly has it been said, “He who loves iniquity hates his own soul.” And accordingly the soul becomes weak, and endures much suffering about the mortal body. For, of course, it must love the body, and be grieved at its corruption; and the immortality and incorruptibility of the body spring out of the health of the soul. Now the health of the soul is to cling steadfastly to the better part, that is, to the unchangeable God. But when it aspires to lord it even over those who are by nature its equals,—that is, its fellow-men,—this is a reach of arrogance utterly intolerable.

24. No man, then, hates himself. On this point, indeed, no question was ever raised by any sect. But neither does any man hate his own body. For the apostle says truly, “No man ever yet hated his own flesh.” And when some people say that they would rather be without a body altogether, they entirely deceive themselves. For it is not their body, but its corruptions and its heaviness, that they hate. And so it is not no body, but an uncorrupted and very light body, that they want. But they think a body of that kind would be no body at all, because they think such a thing as that must be a spirit. And as to the fact that they seem in some sort to scourge their bodies by abstinence and toil, those who do this in the right spirit do it not that they may get rid of their body, but that they may have it in subjection and ready for every needful work. For they strive by a kind of toilsome exercise of the body itself to root out those lusts that are hurtful to the body, that is, those habits and affections of the soul that lead to the enjoyment of unworthy objects. They are not destroying themselves; they are taking care of their health.

25. Those, on the other hand, who do this in a perverse spirit, make war upon their own body as if it were a natural enemy. And in this matter they are led astray by a mistaken interpretation of what they read: “The flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other.” For this is said of the carnal habit yet unsubdued, against which the spirit lusts, not to destroy the body, but to eradicate the lust of the body—i.e., its evil habit—and thus to make it subject to the spirit, which is what the order of nature demands. For as, after the resurrection, the body, having become wholly subject to the spirit, will live in perfect peace to all eternity; even in this life we

must make it an object to have the carnal habit changed for the better, so that its inordinate affections may not war against the soul. And until this shall take place, “the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh;” the spirit struggling, not in hatred, but for the mastery, because it desires that what it loves should be subject to the higher principle; and the flesh struggling, not in hatred, but because of the bondage of habit which it has derived from its parent stock, and which has grown in upon it by a law of nature till it has become inveterate.

The spirit, then, in subduing the flesh, is working as it were to destroy the ill-founded peace of an evil habit, and to bring about the real peace which springs out of a good habit. Nevertheless, not even those who, led astray by false notions, hate their bodies would be prepared to sacrifice one eye, even supposing they could do so without suffering any pain, and that they had as much sight left in one as they formerly had in two, unless some object was to be attained which would overbalance the loss. This and other indications of the same kind are sufficient to show those who candidly seek the truth how well-founded is the statement of the apostle when he says, “No man ever yet hated his own flesh.” He adds too, “but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord the Church.”

26. Man, therefore, ought to be taught the due measure of loving, that is, in what measure he may love himself so as to be of service to himself. For that he does love himself, and does desire to do good to himself, nobody but a fool would doubt. He is to be taught, too, in what measure to love his body, so as to care for it wisely and within due limits. For it is equally manifest that he loves his body also, and desires to keep it safe and sound. And yet a man may have something that he loves better than the safety and soundness of his body. For many have been found voluntarily to suffer both pains and amputations of some of their limbs that they might obtain other objects which they valued more highly. But no one is to be told not to desire the safety and health of his body because there is something he desires more. For the miser, though he loves money, buys bread for himself,—that is, he gives away money that he is very fond of and desires to heap up,—but it is because he values more highly the bodily health which the bread sustains. It is superfluous to argue longer on a point so very plain, but this is just what the error of wicked men often compels us to do.

27. Seeing, then, that there is no need of a command that every man should love himself and his own body,—seeing, that is, that we love ourselves, and what is beneath us but connected with us, through a law of nature which has never been violated, and which is common to us with the beasts (for even the beasts love themselves and their own bodies),—it only remained necessary to lay injunctions upon us in regard to God above us, and our neighbor beside us. “You shall love,” He says, “the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your

soul, and with all your mind; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Thus the end of the commandment is love, and that twofold, the love of God and the love of our neighbor. Now, if you take yourself in your entirety,—that is, soul and body together,—and your neighbor in his entirety, soul and body together (for man is made up of soul and body), you will find that none of the classes of things that are to be loved is overlooked in these two commandments.

For though, when the love of God comes first, and the measure of our love for Him is prescribed in such terms that it is evident all other things are to find their center in Him, nothing seems to be said about our love for ourselves; yet when it is said, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," it at once becomes evident that our love for ourselves has not been overlooked.

28. Now he is a man of just and holy life who forms an unprejudiced estimate of things, and keeps his affections also under strict control, so that he neither loves what he ought not to love, nor fails to love what he ought to love, nor loves that more which ought to be loved less, nor loves that equally which ought to be loved either less or more, nor loves that less or more which ought to be loved equally. No sinner is to be loved as a sinner; and every man is to be loved as a man for God's sake; but God is to be loved for His own sake. And if God is to be loved more than any man, each man ought to love God more than himself. Likewise we ought to love another man better than our own body, because all things are to be loved in reference to God, and another man can have fellowship with us in the enjoyment of God, whereas our body cannot; for the body only lives through the soul, and it is by the soul that we enjoy God.

29. Further, all men are to be loved equally. But since you cannot do good to all, you are to pay special regard to those who, by the accidents of time, or place, or circumstance, are brought into closer connection with you. For, suppose that you had a great deal of some commodity, and felt bound to give it away to somebody who had none, and that it could not be given to more than one person; if two persons presented themselves, neither of whom had either from need or relationship a greater claim upon you than the other, you could do nothing fairer than choose by lot to which you would give what could not be given to both. Just so among men: since you cannot consult for the good of them all, you must take the matter as decided for you by a sort of lot, according as each man happens for the time being to be more closely connected with you.

30. Now of all who can with us enjoy God, we love partly those to whom we render services, partly those who render services to us, partly those who both help us in our need and in turn are helped by us, partly those upon whom we confer no advantage and from whom we look for none. We ought to desire, however, that they should all join with us in loving God, and all the assistance that we either give them or accept from them should tend to that one end. For in

the theaters, dens of iniquity though they be, if a man is fond of a particular actor, and enjoys his art as a great or even as the very greatest good, he is fond of all who join with him in admiration of his favorite, not for their own sakes, but for the sake of him whom they admire in common; and the more fervent he is in his admiration, the more he works in every way he can to secure new admirers for him, and the more anxious he becomes to show him to others; and if he find anyone comparatively indifferent, he does all he can to excite his interest by urging his favorite's merits: if, however, he meet with anyone who opposes him, he is exceedingly displeased by such a man's contempt of his favorite, and strives in every way he can to remove it.

Now, if this be so, what does it become us to do who live in the fellowship of the love of God, the enjoyment of whom is true happiness of life, to whom all who love Him owe both their own existence and the love they bear Him, concerning whom we have no fear that anyone who comes to know Him will be disappointed in Him, and who desires our love, not for any gain to Himself, but that those who love Him may obtain an eternal reward, even Himself whom they love? And hence it is that we love even our enemies. For we do not fear them, seeing they cannot take away from us what we love; but we pity them rather, because the more they hate us the more are they separated from Him whom we love. For if they would turn to Him, they must of necessity love Him as the supreme good, and love us too as partakers with them in so great a blessing.

31. There arises further in this connection a question about angels. For they are happy in the enjoyment of Him whom we long to enjoy; and the more we enjoy Him in this life as through a glass darkly, the more easy do we find it to bear our pilgrimage, and the more eagerly do we long for its termination. But it is not irrational to ask whether in those two commandments is included the love of angels also. For that He who commanded us to love our neighbor made no exception, as far as men are concerned, is shown both by our Lord Himself in the Gospel, and by the Apostle Paul. For when the man to whom our Lord delivered those two commandments, and to whom He said that on these hang all the law and the prophets, asked Him, "And who is my neighbor?" He told him of a certain man who, going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, fell among thieves, and was severely wounded by them, and left naked and half dead. And He showed him that nobody was neighbor to this man except him who took pity upon him and came forward to relieve and care for him.

And the man who had asked the question admitted the truth of this when he was himself interrogated in turn. To whom our Lord says, "Go and do you likewise;" teaching us that he is our neighbor whom it is our duty to help in his need, or whom it would be our duty to help if he were in need. From where it follows, that he whose duty it would be in turn to help us is our neighbor. For the name "neighbor" is a relative one, and no one can be neighbor except to a

neighbor. And, again, who does not see that no exception is made of anyone as a person to whom the offices of mercy may be denied when our Lord extends the rule even to our enemies? “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.”

32. And so also the Apostle Paul teaches when he says: “For this, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, You shall not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love works no ill to his neighbor.” Whoever then supposes that the apostle did not embrace every man in this precept, is compelled to admit, what is at once most absurd and most pernicious, that the apostle thought it no sin, if a man were not a Christian or were an enemy, to commit adultery with his wife, or to kill him, or to covet his goods. And as nobody but a fool would say this, it is clear that every man is to be considered our neighbor, because we are to work no ill to any man.

33. But now, if everyone to whom we ought to show, or who ought to show to us, the offices of mercy is by right called a neighbor, it is manifest that the command to love our neighbor embraces the holy angels also, seeing that so great offices of mercy have been performed by them on our behalf, as may easily be shown by turning the attention to many passages of Holy Scripture. And on this ground even God Himself, our Lord, desired to be called our neighbor. For our Lord Jesus Christ points to Himself under the figure of the man who brought aid to him who was lying half dead on the road, wounded and abandoned by the robbers. And the Psalmist says in his prayer, “I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother.” But as the Divine nature is of higher excellence than, and far removed above, our nature, the command to love God is distinct from that to love our neighbor. For He shows us pity on account of His own goodness, but we show pity to one another on account of His;—that is, He pities us that we may fully enjoy Himself; we pity one another that we may fully enjoy Him.

34. And on this ground, when we say that we enjoy only that which we love for its own sake, and that nothing is a true object of enjoyment except that which makes us happy, and that all other things are for use, there seems still to be something that requires explanation. For God loves us, and Holy Scripture frequently sets before us the love He has towards us. In what way then does He love us? As objects of use or as objects of enjoyment? If He enjoys us, He must be in need of good from us, and no sane man will say that; for all the good we enjoy is either Himself, or what comes from Himself. And no one can be ignorant or in doubt as to the fact that the light stands in no need of the glitter of the things it has itself lit up. The Psalmist says most plainly, “I said to the Lord, You are my God, for You need not my goodness.” He does not enjoy us then, but

makes use of us. For if He neither enjoys nor uses us, I am at a loss to discover in what way He can love us.

35. But neither does He use after our fashion of using. For when we use objects, we do so with a view to the full enjoyment of the goodness of God. God, however, in His use of us, has reference to His own goodness. For it is because He is good we exist; and so far as we truly exist we are good. And, further, because He is also just, we cannot with impunity be evil; and so far as we are evil, so far is our existence less complete. Now He is the first and supreme existence, who is altogether unchangeable, and who could say in the fullest sense of the words, “I AM That I AM,” and “You shall say to them, I AM has sent me to you;” so that all other things that exist, both owe their existence entirely to Him, and are good only so far as He has given it to them to be so. That use, then, which God is said to make of us has no reference to His own advantage, but to ours only; and, so far as He is concerned, has reference only to His goodness.

When we take pity upon a man and care for him, it is for his advantage we do so; but somehow or other our own advantage follows by a sort of natural consequence, for God does not leave the mercy we show to him who needs it to go without reward. Now this is our highest reward, that we should fully enjoy Him, and that all who enjoy Him should enjoy one another in Him.

36. For if we find our happiness complete in one another, we stop short upon the road, and place our hope of happiness in man or angel. Now the proud man and the proud angel arrogate this to themselves, and are glad to have the hope of others fixed upon them. But, on the contrary, the holy man and the holy angel, even when we are weary and anxious to stay with them and rest in them, set themselves to recruit our energies with the provision which they have received of God for us or for themselves; and then urge us thus refreshed to go on our way towards Him, in the enjoyment of whom we find our common happiness. For even the apostle exclaims, “Was Paul crucified for you? or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” and again: “Neither is whoever plants anything, neither whoever waters; but God that gives the increase.” And the angel admonishes the man who is about to worship him, that he should rather worship Him who is his Master, and under whom he himself is a fellow-servant.

37. But when you have joy of a man in God, it is God rather than man that you enjoy. For you enjoy Him by whom you are made happy, and you rejoice to have come to Him in whose presence you place your hope of joy. And accordingly, Paul says to Philemon, “Yes, brother, let me have joy of you in the Lord.” For if he had not added “in the Lord,” but had only said, “Let me have joy of you,” he would have implied that he fixed his hope of happiness upon him, although even in the immediate context to “enjoy” is used in the sense of to “use with delight.” For when the thing that we love is near us, it is a matter of course that it should

bring delight with it. And if you pass beyond this delight, and make it a means to that which you are permanently to rest in, you are using it, and it is an abuse of language to say that you enjoy it. But if you cling to it, and rest in it, finding your happiness complete in it, then you may be truly and properly said to enjoy it. And this we must never do except in the case of the Blessed Trinity, who is the Supreme and Unchangeable Good.

38. And mark that even when He who is Himself the Truth and the Word, by whom all things were made, had been made flesh that He might dwell among us, the apostle yet says: “Yes, though we have known Christ after the flesh, from now on know we Him no more.” For Christ, desiring not only to give the possession to those who had completed the journey, but also to be Himself the way to those who were just setting out, determined to take a fleshly body. From where also that expression, “The Lord created me in the beginning of His way,” that is, that those who wished to come might begin their journey in Him. The apostle, therefore, although still on the way, and following after God who called him to the reward of His heavenly calling, yet forgetting those things which were behind, and pressing on towards those things which were before, had already passed over the beginning of the way, and had now no further need of it; yet by this way all must commence their journey who desire to attain to the truth, and to rest in eternal life.

For He says: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life;” that is, by me men come, to me they come, in me they rest. For when we come to Him, we come to the Father also, because through an equal an equal is known; and the Holy Spirit binds, and as it were seals us, so that we are able to rest permanently in the supreme and unchangeable Good. And hence we may learn how essential it is that nothing should detain us on the way, when not even our Lord Himself, so far as He has condescended to be our way, is willing to detain us, but wishes us rather to press on; and, instead of weakly clinging to temporal things, even though these have been put on and worn by Him for our salvation, to pass over them quickly, and to struggle to attain to Himself, who has freed our nature from the bondage of temporal things, and has set it down at the right hand of His Father.

The End of Scripture and the Character of Its Reader

On Christian Doctrine · Book I, chapters 35-40, complete

39. Of all, then, that has been said since we entered upon the discussion about things, this is the sum: that we should clearly understand that the fulfillment and the end of the Law, and of all Holy Scripture, is the love of an object which is to be enjoyed, and the love of an object which can enjoy that other in fellowship with ourselves. For there is no need of a command that each man should love himself. The whole temporal dispensation for our salvation, therefore, was

framed by the providence of God that we might know this truth and be able to act upon it; and we ought to use that dispensation, not with such love and delight as if it were a good to rest in, but with a transient feeling rather, such as we have towards the road, or carriages, or other things that are merely means. Perhaps some other comparison can be found that will more suitably express the idea that we are to love the things by which we are borne only for the sake of that towards which we are borne.

40. Whoever, then, thinks that he understands the Holy Scriptures, or any part of them, but puts such an interpretation upon them as does not tend to build up this twofold love of God and our neighbor, does not yet understand them as he ought. If, on the other hand, a man draws from them a meaning that may be used for the building up of love, even though he does not happen upon the precise meaning which the author whom he reads intended to express in that place, his error is not pernicious, and he is wholly clear from the charge of deception. For there is involved in deception the intention to say what is false; and we find plenty of people who intend to deceive, but nobody who wishes to be deceived. Since, then, the man who knows practices deceit, and the ignorant man is practiced upon, it is quite clear that in any particular case the man who is deceived is a better man than he who deceives, seeing that it is better to suffer than to commit injustice.

Now every man who lies commits an injustice; and if any man thinks that a lie is ever useful, he must think that injustice is sometimes useful. For no liar keeps faith in the matter about which he lies. He wishes, of course, that the man to whom he lies should place confidence in him; and yet he betrays his confidence by lying to him. Now every man who breaks faith is unjust. Either, then, injustice is sometimes useful (which is impossible), or a lie is never useful.

41. Whoever takes another meaning out of Scripture than the writer intended, goes astray, but not through any falsehood in Scripture. Nevertheless, as I was going to say, if his mistaken interpretation tends to build up love, which is the end of the commandment, he goes astray in much the same way as a man who by mistake quits the high road, but yet reaches through the fields the same place to which the road leads. He is to be corrected, however, and to be shown how much better it is not to quit the straight road, lest, if he get into a habit of going astray, he may sometimes take cross roads, or even go in the wrong direction altogether.

For if he takes up rashly a meaning which the author whom he is reading did not intend, he often falls in with other statements which he cannot harmonize with this meaning. And if he admits that these statements are true and certain, then it follows that the meaning he had put upon the former passage cannot be the true one: and so it comes to pass, one can hardly tell how, that, out of love for his own opinion, he begins to feel more angry with Scripture than he is with

himself. And if he should once permit that evil to creep in, it will utterly destroy him. “For we walk by faith, not by sight.” Now faith will totter if the authority of Scripture begin to shake. And then, if faith totter, love itself will grow cold. For if a man has fallen from faith, he must necessarily also fall from love; for he cannot love what he does not believe to exist. But if he both believes and loves, then through good works, and through diligent attention to the precepts of morality, he comes to hope also that he shall attain the object of his love. And so these are the three things to which all knowledge and all prophecy are subservient: faith, hope, love.

42. But sight shall displace faith; and hope shall be swallowed up in that perfect bliss to which we shall come: love, on the other hand, shall grow greater when these others fail. For if we love by faith that which as yet we see not, how much more shall we love it when we begin to see! And if we love by hope that which as yet we have not reached, how much more shall we love it when we reach it! For there is this great difference between things temporal and things eternal, that a temporal object is valued more before we possess it, and begins to prove worthless the moment we attain it, because it does not satisfy the soul, which has its only true and sure resting-place in eternity: an eternal object, on the other hand, is loved with greater ardor when it is in possession than while it is still an object of desire, for no one in his longing for it can set a higher value on it than really belongs to it, so as to think it comparatively worthless when he finds it of less value than he thought; on the contrary, however high the value any man may set upon it when he is on his way to possess it, he will find it, when it comes into his possession, of higher value still.

43. And thus a man who is resting upon faith, hope and love, and who keeps a firm hold upon these, does not need the Scriptures except for the purpose of instructing others. Accordingly, many live without copies of the Scriptures, even in solitude, on the strength of these three graces. So that in their case, I think, the saying is already fulfilled: “Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.” Yet by means of these instruments (as they may be called), so great an edifice of faith and love has been built up in them, that, holding to what is perfect, they do not seek for what is only in part perfect—of course, I mean, so far as is possible in this life; for, in comparison with the future life, the life of no just and holy man is perfect here. Therefore the apostle says: “Now abides faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love:” because, when a man shall have reached the eternal world, while the other two graces will fail, love will remain greater and more assured.

44. And, therefore, if a man fully understands that “the end of the commandment is love, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned,” and is bent upon making all his understanding of Scripture to bear

upon these three graces, he may come to the interpretation of these books with an easy mind. For while the apostle says “love,” he adds “out of a pure heart,” to provide against anything being loved but that which is worthy of love. And he joins with this “a good conscience,” in reference to hope; for, if a man has the burthen of a bad conscience, he despairs of ever reaching that which he believes in and loves. And in the third place he says: “and of faith unfeigned.” For if our faith is free from all hypocrisy, then we both abstain from loving what is unworthy of our love, and by living uprightly we are able to indulge the hope that our hope shall not be in vain.

For these reasons I have been anxious to speak about the objects of faith, as far as I thought it necessary for my present purpose; for much has already been said on this subject in other volumes, either by others or by myself. And so let this be the end of the present book. In the next I shall discuss, as far as God shall give me light, the subject of signs.

Reading Notes

1. Enjoyment and use are technical terms in Augustine's argument. Enjoyment refers to resting in something as the final object of happiness; use refers to a relationship directed toward that end.

2. The source distinguishes a mistaken interpretation that happens to encourage love from an accurate interpretation of an author's meaning. Augustine calls for correction of the former while recognizing the good toward which the interpreter is moving.

PART VII

The Church and Its Power

Augustine's concern for unity becomes a public and political concern in his correspondence. The same bishop who examines the inward motives of the will also writes to religious opponents, judges, and military officials. His arguments distinguish sincere error from stubborn resistance, defend communion with an imperfect Church, and explain why he eventually accepted imperial pressure against religious division. They also ask officials to spare the lives and bodies of people accused of brutal violence.

These selections preserve that range. They begin with the question of how Christians can disagree and still recognize a common life. The long central reading gives Augustine's case for coercion in his own sustained argument, including his report of a change in his judgment. The final readings set his demands for mercy and his instructions to a soldier beside that defense. The historical claims about Donatists and their associates are Augustine's claims in a contested conflict. His opponents are heard here mainly through the objections he chooses to answer.

The part therefore calls for attention to the relationship among an institution's conviction that it possesses truth, its understanding of love, and its ability to use force. Augustine offers reasons for each of his positions. Those reasons, and the tensions they create, remain visible in the selections.

CHAPTER 19

Unity and Disagreement

Letter 43, written in 397, distinguishes an inherited error held by someone seeking correction from error maintained with determined obstinacy. Augustine resists treating every disagreement as a final judgment on the person who disagrees. Even the correction of a heretic remains, for him, an obligation of love.

Letter 93, written in 408 to Vincentius of the Rogatist branch of the Donatist movement, appeals to the Church's geographical breadth and scriptural promises. Augustine describes a mixed community in which good and bad remain together until the final judgment. Wrongdoing within that community does not, in his account, make separation necessary.

He interprets the wheat and weeds and the net containing good and bad fish as reasons for preserving communion through moral disorder. His appeal denies a religious party the right to define itself as the sole uncontaminated body. Yet this defense of patience and universality belongs to the same letter whose earlier sections defend coercion. That connection becomes central in the following chapter.

Augustine

Disagreement and the Search for Truth

Letter 43 · sections 1–2

1. The Apostle Paul has said: “A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject, knowing that he that is such is subverted and sins, being condemned of himself.” But though the doctrine which men hold be false and perverse, if they do not maintain it with passionate obstinacy, especially when they have not devised it by the rashness of their own presumption, but have accepted it from parents who had been misguided and had fallen into error, and if they are with anxiety seeking the truth, and are prepared to be set right when they have found it, such men are not to be counted heretics. Were it not that I believe you to be such, perhaps I would not write to you. And yet even in the case of a heretic, however puffed up with odious conceit, and insane through the obstinacy of his wicked resistance to truth, although we warn others to avoid him, so that he may not deceive the weak and inexperienced, we do not refuse to strive by every means in our power for his correction.

On this ground I wrote even to some of the chief of the Donatists, not indeed letters of communion, which on account of their perversity they have long ceased to receive from the undivided Catholic Church which is spread

throughout the world, but letters of a private kind, such as we may send even to pagans.

These letters, however, though they have sometimes read them, they have not been willing, or perhaps it is more probable, have not been able, to answer. In these cases, it seems to me that I have discharged the obligation laid on me by that love which the Holy Spirit teaches us to render, not only to our own, but to all, saying by the apostle: “The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men.” In another place we are warned that those who are of a different opinion from us must be corrected with meekness, “if God perhaps will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.”

2. I have said these things by way of preface, lest any one should think, because you are not of our communion, that I have been influenced by forwardness rather than consideration in sending this letter, and in desiring thus to confer with you regarding the welfare of the soul; though I believe that, if I were writing to you about an affair of property, or the settlement of some dispute about money, no one would find fault with me. So precious is this world in the esteem of men, and so small is the value which they set upon themselves! This letter, therefore, shall be a witness in my vindication at the bar of God, who knows the spirit in which I write, and who has said: “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the sons of God.”

The Mixed Community and the Claim to Unity

Letter 93 · sections 28–34

28. We, however, are certain that no one could ever have been warranted in separating himself from the communion of all nations, because every one of us looks for the marks of the Church not in his own righteousness, but in the Divine Scriptures, and beholds it actually in existence, according to the promises. For it is of the Church that it is said,“As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters;” which could be called on the one hand “thorns” only by reason of the wickedness of their manners, and on the other hand “daughters” by reason of their participation in the same sacraments. Again, it is the Church which says, “From the end of the earth have I cried to You when my heart was overwhelmed;” and in another Psalm, “Horror has kept me back from the wicked that forsake Your law;” and, “I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved.” It is the same which says to her Spouse: “Tell me where You feed, where You do rest at noon: for why should I be as one veiled beside the flocks of Your companions?” This is the same as is said in another place: “Make known to me Your right hand, and those who are in heart taught in wisdom;” in whom, as they shine with light and glow with love, You do rest as in noontide; lest perhaps, like

one veiled, that is, hidden and unknown, I should run, not to Your flock, but to the flocks of Your companions, i.e. of heretics, whom the bride here calls companions, just as He called the thorns “daughters,” because of common participation in the sacraments: of which persons it is elsewhere said: “You were a man, my equal, my guide, my acquaintance, who did take sweet food together with me; we walked to the house of God in company.

Let death seize upon them, and let them go down quick into hell,” like Dathan and Abiram, the authors of an impious schism.

29. It is to the Church also that the answer is given immediately after in the passage quoted above: “If you do not know yourself, O you fairest among women, go your way forth by the footsteps of the flocks, and feed your kids beside the shepherds’ tents.” Oh, matchless sweetness of the Bridegroom, who thus replied to her question: “If you do not know yourself,” He says; as if He said, “Surely the city which is set upon a mountain cannot be hid; and therefore, ‘You are not as one veiled, that you should run to the flocks of my companions.’ For I am the mountain established upon the top of the mountains, to which all nations shall come. ‘If you do not know yourself,’ by the knowledge which you may gain, not in the words of false witnesses, but in the testimonies of My book; ‘if you do not know yourself,’ from such testimony as this concerning you: ‘Lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes: for you shall break forth on the right hand and on the left; and your seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.

Fear not, for you shall not be ashamed; and do not be confounded, for you shall not be put to shame: for you shall forget the shame of your youth, and shall not remember the reproach of your widowhood any more: for your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is His name, and your Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; the God of the whole earth shall He be called.’ ‘If you do not know yourself,’ O you fairest among women, from this which has been said of you, ‘The King has greatly desired your beauty,’ and ‘instead of your fathers shall be your children, whom you may make princes upon the earth:’ if, therefore, ‘you do not know yourself,’ go your way forth: I do not cast you forth, but ‘go your way forth,’ that of you it may be said, ‘They went out from us, but they were not of us.’ ‘Go your way forth’ by the footsteps of the flocks, not in My footsteps, but in the footsteps of the flocks; and not of the one flock, but of flocks divided and going astray.

‘And feed your kids,’ not as Peter, to whom it is said, ‘Feed My sheep;’ but, ‘Feed your kids beside the shepherds’ tents,’ not beside the tent of the Shepherd, where there is ‘one fold and one Shepherd.’” But the church knows herself, and by that escapes from that lot which has befallen those who did not know themselves to be in her.

30. The same [Church] is spoken of, when, in regard to the fewness of her numbers as compared with the multitude of the wicked, it is said: “Strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leads to life, and few there be that find it.” And again, it is of the same Church that it is said with respect to the multitude of her members: “I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore.” For the same Church of holy and good believers is both small if compared with the number of the wicked, which is greater, and large if considered by itself; “for the desolate has more sons than she which has a husband,” and “many shall come from the east and from the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God.” God, moreover, presents to Himself a “numerous people, zealous of good works.” And in the Apocalypse, many thousands “which no man can number,” from every tribe and tongue, are seen clothed in white robes, and with palms of victory. It is the same Church which is occasionally obscured, and, as it were, beclouded by the multitude of offenses, when sinners bend the bow that they may shoot under the darkened moon at the upright in heart.

But even at such a time the Church shines in those who are most firm in their attachment to her. And if, in the Divine promise above quoted, any distinct application of its two clauses should be made, it is perhaps not without reason that the seed of Abraham was compared both to the “stars of heaven,” and to “the sand which is by the seashore:” that by “the stars” may be understood those who, in number fewer, are more fixed and more brilliant; and that by “the sand on the seashore” may be understood that great multitude of weak and carnal persons within the Church, who at one time are seen at rest and free while the weather is calm, but are at another time covered and troubled under the waves of tribulation and temptation.

31. Now, such a troublous time was the time at which Hilary wrote in the passage which you have thought fit artfully to adduce against so many Divine testimonies, as if by it you could prove that the Church has perished from the earth. You may just as well say that the numerous churches of Galatia had no existence at the time when the apostle wrote to them: “O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you,” that, “having begun in the Spirit, you are now made perfect in the flesh?” For thus you would misrepresent that learned man, who (like the apostle) was sternly rebuking the slow of heart and the timid, for whom he was travailing in birth a second time, until Christ should be formed in them. For who does not know that many persons of weak judgment were at that time deluded by ambiguous phrases, so that they thought that the Arians believed the same doctrines as they themselves held; and that others, through fear, had yielded and feigned consent, not walking uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, to whom you would have denied that forgiveness which, when they had been

turned from their error, was extended to them? But in refusing such pardon, you prove yourselves wholly ignorant of the word of God.

For read what Paul has recorded concerning Peter, and what Cyprian has expressed as his view on the ground of that statement, and do not blame the compassion of the Church, which does not scatter the members of Christ when they are gathered together, but labors to gather His scattered members into one. It is true that those who then stood most resolute, and were able to understand the treacherous phrases used by the heretics, were few in number when compared with the rest; but some of them it is to be remembered were then bravely enduring sentence of banishment, and others were hiding themselves for safety in all parts of the world. And thus the Church, which is increasing throughout all nations, has been preserved as the Lord's wheat, and shall be preserved to the end, yes, until all nations, even the barbarous tribes, are within its embrace. For it is the Church which the Son of man has sown as good seed, and of which He has foretold that it should grow among the tares until the harvest. For the field is the world, and the harvest is the end of time.

32. Hilary, therefore, either was rebuking not the wheat, but the tares, in those ten provinces of Asia, or was addressing himself to the wheat, because it was endangered through some unfaithfulness, and spoke as one who thought that the rebuke would be useful in proportion to the vehemence with which it was given. For the canonical Scriptures contain examples of the same manner of rebuke in which what is intended for some is spoken as if it applied to all. Thus the apostle, when he says to the Corinthians, "How say some among you, that there is no resurrection of the dead?" proves clearly that all of them were not such; but he bears witness that those who were such were not outside of their communion, but among them. And shortly after, lest those who were of a different opinion should be led astray by them, he gave this warning: "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners. Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame." But when he says, "Whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are you not carnal, and walk as men?" he speaks as if it applied to all, and you see how grave a charge he makes.

Therefore, if it were not that we read in the same epistle, "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in everything you are enriched by Him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: so that you come behind in no gift," we would think that all the Corinthians had been carnal and natural, not perceiving the things of the spirit of God, fond of strife, and full of envy, and "walking as men." In like manner it is said, on the one hand, "the whole world lies in wickedness," because of the tares which are throughout the whole world; and, on the other hand, Christ "is the propitiation for our sins, and

not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world," because of the wheat which is throughout the whole world.

33. The love of many, however, waxes cold because of offenses, which abound increasingly the more that, within the communion of the sacraments of Christ, there are gathered to the glory of His name even those who are wicked, and who persist in the obstinacy of error; whose separation, however, as chaff from the wheat, is to be effected only in the final purging of the Lord's threshing floor. These do not destroy those who are the Lord's wheat—few, indeed, when compared with the others, but in themselves a great multitude; they do not destroy the elect of God, who are to be gathered at the end of the world from the four winds, from the one end of heaven to the other. For it is from the elect that the cry comes, "Help, Lord! for the godly man ceases, for the faithful fail from among the children of men;" and it is of them that the Lord says, "He that shall endure to the end (when iniquity shall abound), the same shall be saved." Moreover, that the psalm quoted is the language not of one man, but of many, is shown by the following context: "You shall keep us, O Lord; You shall preserve us from this generation forever." On account of this abounding iniquity which the Lord foretold, it is said in another place: "When the Son of man comes, shall He find faith on the earth?" This doubt expressed by Him who knows all things prefigured the doubts which in Him we entertain, when the Church, being often disappointed in many from whom much was expected, but who have proved very different from what they were supposed to be, is so alarmed in regard to her own members, that she is slow to believe good of any one.

Nevertheless it would be wrong to cherish doubt that those whose faith He shall find on the earth are growing along with the tares throughout the whole field.

34. Therefore it is the same Church also which within the Lord's net is swimming along with the bad fishes, but is in heart and in life separated from them, and departs from them, that she may be presented to her Lord a "glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle." But the actual visible separation she looks for only on the seashore, i.e. at the end of the world,—meanwhile correcting as many as she can, and bearing with those whom she cannot correct; but she does not abandon the unity of the good because of the wickedness of those whom she finds incorrigible.

Reading Notes

1. The first selection preserves the opening argument of Letter 43. The second preserves the continuous argument in Letter 93, sections 28–34. Their placement here follows the theme of Church unity rather than the order of sections within Letter 93.

CHAPTER 20

Persuasion and Compulsion

Letter 93 provides one of Augustine's clearest explanations of why he accepted coercion in a religious dispute. The selected sequence begins at the opening of the letter and continues through section 19. It includes the objections Augustine attributes to Vincentius, his biblical examples, his appeal to the conduct of rival parties, and the statement that he formerly favored persuasion by words and arguments alone.

Augustine reasons from what he regards as the success of imperial laws in bringing people into Catholic communion. He describes fear as a means of breaking habit, prompting inquiry, or protecting people who already wished to leave their former association. He insists that fear must be joined to instruction and that a person must eventually embrace the truth willingly. His medical and parental analogies present unpleasant treatment as an expression of care for the person subjected to it.

The argument also relies on his confidence that the communion he defends is the Church promised in Scripture. Once that premise is granted, pressure toward unity can appear to him as rescue from error. His comparison between the coercion of the Church's enemies and the coercion exercised for the Church rests on the claimed difference of their causes and intentions. The reader can therefore follow the point at which Augustine's account of love becomes a justification for institutional force.

The selection retains his severe language and his account of opponents' conduct. Its purpose is to make the argument available for judgment in its own form. Augustine's report that people benefited from coercion belongs to his defense of the policy; it is not an independent account from everyone who experienced those laws.

Augustine

The Case for Coercion and a Change of Judgment

Letter 93 · sections 1–19

1. I have received a letter which I believe to be from you to me: at least I have not thought this incredible, for the person who brought it is one whom I know to be a Catholic Christian, and who, I think, would not dare to impose upon me. But even though the letter may perhaps not be from you, I have considered it necessary to write a reply to the author, whoever he may be. You know me now to be more desirous of rest, and earnest in seeking it, than when you knew me in my earlier years at Carthage, in the lifetime of your immediate predecessor Rogatus. But we are precluded from this rest by the Donatists, the repression and correction of whom, by the powers which are ordained of God, appears to

me to be labor not in vain. For we already rejoice in the correction of many who hold and defend the Catholic unity with such sincerity, and are so glad to have been delivered from their former error, that we admire them with great thankfulness and pleasure.

Yet these same persons, under some indescribable bondage of custom, would in no way have thought of being changed to a better condition, had they not, under the shock of this alarm, directed their minds earnestly to the study of the truth; fearing lest, if without profit, and in vain, they suffered hard things at the hands of men, for the sake not of righteousness, but of their own obstinacy and presumption, they should afterwards do not receivehing else at the hand of God than the punishment due to wicked men who despised the admonition which He so gently gave and His paternal correction; and being by such reflection made teachable, they found not in mischievous or frivolous human fables, but in the promises of the divine books, that universal Church which they saw extending according to the promise throughout all nations: just as, on the testimony of prophecy in the same Scriptures, they believed without hesitation that Christ is exalted above the heavens, though He is not seen by them in His glory.

Was it my duty to be displeased at the salvation of these men, and to call back my colleagues from a fatherly diligence of this kind, the result of which has been, that we see many blaming their former blindness? For they see that they were blind who believed Christ to have been exalted above the heavens although they saw Him not, and yet denied that His glory is spread over all the earth although they saw it; whereas the prophet has with so great plainness included both in one sentence, “Be exalted, O God, above the heavens, and Your glory above all the earth.”

2. Therefore, if we were so to overlook and forbear with those cruel enemies who seriously disturb our peace and quietness by manifold and grievous forms of violence and treachery, as that nothing at all should be contrived and done by us with a view to alarm and correct them, truly we would be rendering evil for evil. For if any one saw his enemy running headlong to destroy himself when he had become delirious through a dangerous fever, would he not in that case be much more truly rendering evil for evil if he permitted him to run on thus, than if he took measures to have him seized and bound? And yet he would at that moment appear to the other to be most vexatious, and most like an enemy, when, in truth, he had proved himself most useful and most compassionate; although, no doubt, when his health was restored, he would express to him his gratitude with a warmth proportioned to the measure in which he had felt his refusal to indulge him in his time of frenzy.

Oh, if I could but show you how many we have even from the Circumcelliones, who are now approved Catholics, and condemn their former life, and the wretched delusion under which they believed that they were doing on behalf of

the Church of God whatever they did under the promptings of a restless temerity, who nevertheless would not have been brought to this soundness of judgment had they not been, as persons beside themselves, bound with the cords of those laws which are distasteful to you!

As to another form of most serious distemper,—that, namely, of those who had not, indeed, a boldness leading to acts of violence, but were pressed down by a kind of inveterate sluggishness of mind, and would say to us: “What you affirm is true, nothing can be said against it; but it is hard for us to leave off what we have received, by tradition from our fathers,”—why should not such persons be shaken up in a beneficial way by a law bringing upon them inconvenience in worldly things, in order that they might rise from their lethargic sleep, and awake to the salvation which is to be found in the unity of the Church? How many of them, now rejoicing with us, speak bitterly of the weight with which their ruinous course formerly oppressed them, and confess that it was our duty to inflict annoyance upon them, in order to prevent them from perishing under the disease of lethargic habit, as under a fatal sleep!

3. You will say that to some these remedies are of no service. Is the art of healing, therefore, to be abandoned, because the malady of some is incurable? You look only to the case of those who are so obdurate that they refuse even such correction. Of such it is written, “In vain have I smitten your children: they received no correction:” and yet I suppose that those of whom the prophet speaks were smitten in love, not from hatred. But you ought to consider also the very large number over whose salvation we rejoice. For if they were only made afraid, and not instructed, this might appear to be a kind of inexcusable tyranny. Again, if they were instructed only, and not made afraid, they would be with more difficulty persuaded to embrace the way of salvation, having become hardened through the inveteracy of custom: whereas many whom we know well, when arguments had been brought before them, and the truth made apparent by testimonies from the word of God, answered us that they desired to pass into the communion of the Catholic Church, but were in fear of the violence of worthless men, whose enmity they would incur; which violence they ought indeed by all means to despise when it was to be borne for righteousness’ sake, and for the sake of eternal life.

Nevertheless the weakness of such men ought not to be regarded as hopeless, but to be supported until they gain more strength. Nor may we forget what the Lord Himself said to Peter when he was yet weak: “You can not follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward.” When, however, wholesome instruction is added to means of inspiring beneficial fear, so that not only the light of truth may dispel the darkness of error, but the force of fear may at the same time break the bonds of evil custom, we are made glad, as I have said, by the salvation of many, who with us bless God, and render thanks to Him, because by

the fulfillment of His covenant, in which He promised that the kings of the earth should serve Christ, He has thus cured the diseased and restored health to the weak.

4. Not every one who is indulgent is a friend; nor is every one an enemy who smites. Better are the wounds of a friend than the proffered kisses of an enemy. It is better with severity to love, than with gentleness to deceive. More good is done by taking away food from one who is hungry, if, through freedom from care as to his food, he is forgetful of righteousness, than by providing bread for one who is hungry, in order that, being by that bribed, he may consent to unrighteousness. He who binds the man who is in a frenzy, and he who stirs up the man who is in a lethargy, are alike vexatious to both, and are in both cases alike prompted by love for the patient. Who can love us more than God does? And yet He not only gives us gentle instruction, but also quickens us by beneficial fear, and this unceasingly. Often adding to the soothing remedies by which He comforts men the sharp medicine of tribulation, He afflicts with famine even the pious and devout patriarchs, disquiets a rebellious people by more severe chastisements, and refuses, though thrice asked, to take away the thorn in the flesh of the apostle, that He may make His strength perfect in weakness.

Let us by all means love even our enemies, for this is right, and God commands us so to do, in order that we may be the children of our Father who is in heaven, “who makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” But as we praise these His gifts, let us likewise ponder His correction of those whom He loves.

5. You are of opinion that no one should be compelled to follow righteousness; and yet you read that the householder said to his servants, “Whomever you shall find, compel them to come in.” You also read how he who was at first Saul, and afterwards Paul, was compelled, by the great violence with which Christ coerced him, to know and to embrace the truth; for you cannot but think that the light which your eyes enjoy is more precious to men than money or any other possession. This light, lost suddenly by him when he was cast to the ground by the heavenly voice, he did not recover until he became a member of the Holy Church. You are also of opinion that no coercion is to be used with any man for his deliverance from the fatal consequences of error; and yet you see that, in examples which cannot be disputed, this is done by God, who loves us with more real regard for our profit than any other can; and you hear Christ saying, “No man can come to me except the Father draw him,” which is done in the hearts of all those who, through fear of the wrath of God, turn to Him. You know also that sometimes the thief scatters food before the flock that he may lead them astray, and sometimes the shepherd brings wandering sheep back to the flock with his rod.

6. Did not Sarah, when she had the power, choose rather to afflict the insolent bondwoman? And truly she did not cruelly hate her whom she had formerly by an act of her own kindness made a mother; but she put a wholesome restraint upon her pride. Moreover, as you well know, these two women, Sarah and Hagar, and their two sons Isaac and Ishmael, are figures representing spiritual and carnal persons. And although we read that the bondwoman and her son suffered great hardships from Sarah, nevertheless the Apostle Paul says that Isaac suffered persecution from Ishmael: “But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now;” from where those who have understanding may perceive that it is rather the Catholic Church which suffers persecution through the pride and impiety of those carnal men whom it endeavors to correct by afflictions and terrors of a temporal kind. Whatever therefore the true and rightful Mother does, even when something severe and bitter is felt by her children at her hands, she is not rendering evil for evil, but is applying the benefit of discipline to counteract the evil of sin, not with the hatred which seeks to harm, but with the love which seeks to heal.

When good and bad do the same actions and suffer the same afflictions, they are to be distinguished not by what they do or suffer, but by the causes of each: e.g. Pharaoh oppressed the people of God by hard bondage; Moses afflicted the same people by severe correction when they were guilty of impiety: their actions were alike; but they were not alike in the motive of regard to the people’s welfare,—the one being inflated by the lust of power, the other inflamed by love. Jezebel slew prophets, Elijah slew false prophets; I suppose that the desert of the actors and of the sufferers respectively in the two cases was wholly diverse.

7. Look also to the New Testament times, in which the essential gentleness of love was to be not only kept in the heart, but also manifested openly: in these the sword of Peter is called back into its sheath by Christ, and we are taught that it ought not to be taken from its sheath even in Christ’s defense. We read, however, not only that the Jews beat the Apostle Paul, but also that the Greeks beat Sosthenes, a Jew, on account of the Apostle Paul. Does not the similarity of the events apparently join both; and, at the same time, does not the dissimilarity of the causes make a real difference? Again, God spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all. Of the Son also it is said, “who loved me, and gave Himself for me;” and it is also said of Judas that Satan entered into him that he might betray Christ. Seeing, therefore, that the Father delivered up His Son, and Christ delivered up His own body, and Judas delivered up his Master, therefore is God holy and man guilty in this delivering up of Christ, unless that in the one action which both did, the reason for which they did it was not the same?

Three crosses stood in one place: on one was the thief who was to be saved; on the second, the thief who was to be condemned; on the third, between them, was Christ, who was about to save the one thief and condemn the other. What

could be more similar than these crosses? what more unlike than the persons who were suspended on them? Paul was given up to be imprisoned and bound, but Satan is unquestionably worse than any jailer: yet to him Paul himself gave up one man for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. And what say we to this? Look, both deliver a man to bondage; but he that is cruel consigns his prisoner to one less severe, while he that is compassionate consigns his to one who is more cruel. Let us learn, my brother, in actions which are similar to distinguish the intentions of the agents; and let us not, shutting our eyes, deal in groundless reproaches, and accuse those who seek men's welfare as if they did them wrong. In like manner, when the same apostle says that he had delivered certain persons to Satan, that they might learn not to blaspheme, did he render to these men evil for evil, or did he not rather esteem it a good work to correct evil men through the evil one?

8. If to suffer persecution were in all cases a praiseworthy thing, it would have sufficed for the Lord to say, "Blessed are they which are persecuted," without adding "for righteousness' sake." Moreover, if to inflict persecution were in all cases blameworthy, it would not have been written in the sacred books, "Whoever privily slanders his neighbor, him will I persecute [cut off, E.V.]." In some cases, therefore, both he that suffers persecution is in the wrong, and he that inflicts it is in the right. But the truth is, that always both the bad have persecuted the good, and the good have persecuted the bad: the former doing harm by their unrighteousness, the latter seeking to do good by the administration of discipline; the former with cruelty, the latter with moderation; the former impelled by lust, the latter under the constraint of love. For he whose aim is to kill is not careful how he wounds, but he whose aim is to cure is cautious with his lancet; for the one seeks to destroy what is sound, the other that which is decaying.

The wicked put prophets to death; prophets also put the wicked to death. The Jews scourged Christ; Christ also scourged the Jews. The apostles were given up by men to the civil powers; the apostles themselves gave men up to the power of Satan. In all these cases, what is important to attend to but this: who were on the side of truth, and who on the side of iniquity; who acted from a desire to injure, and who from a desire to correct what was amiss?

9. You say that no example is found in the writings of evangelists and apostles, of any petition presented on behalf of the Church to the kings of the earth against her enemies. Who denies this? None such is found. But at that time the prophecy, "Be wise now, therefore, O you kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth: serve the Lord with fear," was not yet fulfilled. Up to that time the words which we find at the beginning of the same Psalm were receiving their fulfillment, "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against

the Lord, and against His Anointed." Truly, if past events recorded in the prophetic books were figures of the future, there was given under King Nebuchadnezzar a figure both of the time which the Church had under the apostles, and of that which she has now. In the age of the apostles and martyrs, that was fulfilled which was prefigured when the previously mentioned king compelled pious and just men to bow down to his image, and cast into the flames all who refused.

Now, however, is fulfilled that which was prefigured soon after in the same king, when, being converted to the worship of the true God, he made a decree throughout his empire, that whoever should speak against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, should suffer the penalty which their crime deserved.

The earlier time of that king represented the former age of emperors who did not believe in Christ, at whose hands the Christians suffered because of the wicked; but the later time of that king represented the age of the successors to the imperial throne, now believing in Christ, at whose hands the wicked suffer because of the Christians.

10. It is manifest, however, that moderate severity, or rather clemency, is carefully observed towards those who, under the Christian name, have been led astray by perverse men, in the measures used to prevent them who are Christ's sheep from wandering, and to bring them back to the flock, when by punishments, such as exile and fines, they are admonished to consider what they suffer, and therefore, and are taught to prefer the Scriptures which they read to human legends and calumnies. For which of us, yes, which of you, does not speak well of the laws issued by the emperors against heathen sacrifices? In these, assuredly, a penalty much more severe has been appointed, for the punishment of that impiety is death. But in repressing and restraining you, the thing aimed at has been rather that you should be admonished to depart from evil, than that you should be punished for a crime. For perhaps what the apostle said of the Jews may be said of you: "I testify for them that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge: for, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and going about to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God." For what else than your own righteousness are you desiring to establish, when you say that none are justified but those who may have had the opportunity of being baptized by you?

In regard to this statement made by the apostle concerning the Jews, you differ from those to whom it originally applied in this, that you have the Christian sacraments, of which they are still destitute. But in regard to the words, "being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness," and "they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge," you are exactly like them, excepting only those among you who know what is the truth, and who in the wilfulness of their perversity continue to

fight against truth which is perfectly well known to them. The impiety of these men is perhaps even a greater sin than idolatry. Since, however, they cannot be easily convicted of this (for it is a sin which lies concealed in the mind), you are all alike restrained with a comparatively gentle severity, as being not so far alienated from us. And this I may say, both concerning all heretics without distinction, who, while retaining the Christian sacraments, are dissenters from the truth and unity of Christ, and concerning all Donatists without exception.

11. But as for you, who are not only, in common with these last, styled Donatists, from Donatus, but also specially named Rogatists, from Rogatus, you indeed seem to be more gentle in disposition, because you do not rage up and down with bands of these savage Circumcelliones: but no wild beast is said to be gentle if, because of its not having teeth and claws, it wounds no one. You say that you have no wish to be cruel: I think that power, not will is wanting to you. For you are in number so few, that even if you desire it, you dare not move against the multitudes which are opposed to you. Let us suppose, however, that you do not wish to do that which you have not strength to do; let us suppose that the gospel rule, “If any man will sue you at the law and take away your coat, let him have your cloak also,” is so understood and obeyed by you that resistance to those who persecute you is unlawful, whether they have right or wrong on their side. Rogatus, the founder of your sect, either did not hold this view, or was guilty of inconsistency; for he fought with the keenest determination in a lawsuit about certain things which, according to your statement, belonged to you.

If to him it had been said, Which of the apostles ever defended his property in a matter concerning faith by appeal to the civil courts? as you have put the question in your letter, “Which of the apostles ever invaded the property of other men in a matter concerning faith?” he could not find any example of this in the Divine writings; but he might perhaps have found some true defense if he had not separated himself from the true Church, and then audaciously claimed to hold in the name of the true Church the disputed possession.

12. As to the obtaining or putting in force of edicts of the powers of this world against schismatics and heretics, those from whom you separated yourselves were very active in this matter, both against you, so far as we have heard, and against the followers of Maximianus, as we prove by the indisputable evidence of their own Records; but you had not yet separated yourselves from them at the time when in their petition they said to the Emperor Julian that “nothing but righteousness found a place with him,”—a man whom all the while they knew to be an apostate, and whom they saw to be so given over to idolatry, that they must either admit idolatry to be righteousness, or be unable to deny that they had wickedly lied when they said that nothing but righteousness had a place with him with whom they saw that idolatry had so large a place. Grant, however, that that was a mistake in the use of words, what say you as to the deed itself? If

not even that which is just is to be sought by appeal to an emperor, why was that which was by you supposed to be just sought from Julian?

13. Do you reply that it is lawful to petition the Emperor in order to recover what is one's own, but not lawful to accuse another in order that he may be coerced by the Emperor? I may remark, in passing, that in even petitioning for the recovery of what is one's own, the ground covered by apostolic example is abandoned, because no apostle is found to have ever done this. But apart from this, when your predecessors brought before the Emperor Constantine, through the proconsul Anulinus, their accusations against Caecilianus, who was then bishop of Carthage, with whom as a guilty person they refused to have communion, they were not endeavoring to recover something of their own which they had lost, but were by calumnies assailing one who was, as we think, and as the issue of the judicial proceedings showed, an innocent man; and what more heinous crime could have been perpetrated by them than this? If, however, as you erroneously suppose, they did in his case deliver up to the judgment of the civil powers a man who was indeed guilty, why do you object to our doing that which your own party first presumed to do, and for doing which we would not find fault with them, if they had done it not with an envious desire to do harm, but with the intention of reproving and correcting what was wrong.

But we have no hesitation in finding fault with you, who think that we are criminal in bringing any complaint before a Christian emperor against the enemies of our communion, seeing that a document given by your predecessors to Anulinus the proconsul, to be forwarded by him to the Emperor Constantine, bore this superscription: "Libellus Ecclesiae Catholicae, criminum Caeciliani, traditus a parte Majorini." We find fault, moreover, with them more particularly, because when they had of their own accord gone to the Emperor with accusations against Caecilianus, which they ought by all means to have in the first place proved before those who were his colleagues beyond the sea, and when the Emperor, acting in a much more orderly way than they had done, referred to bishops the decision of this case pertaining to bishops which had been brought before him, they, even when defeated by a decision against them, would not come to peace with their brothers. Instead of this, they next accused at the bar of the temporal sovereign, not Caecilianus only, but also the bishops who had been appointed judges; and finally, from a second episcopal tribunal they appealed to the Emperor again. Nor did they consider it their duty to yield either to truth or to peace when he himself inquired into the case and gave his decision.

14. Now what else could Constantine have decreed against Caecilianus and his friends, if they had been defeated when your predecessors accused them, than the things decreed against the very men who, having of their own accord brought the accusations, and having failed to prove what they alleged, refused

even when defeated to acquiesce in the truth? The Emperor, as you know, in that case decreed for the first time that the property of those who were convicted of schism and obstinately resisted the unity of the Church should be confiscated. If, however, the issue had been that your predecessors who brought the accusations had gained their case, and the Emperor had made some such decree against the communion to which Caecilianus belonged, you would have wished the emperors to be called the friends of the Church's interests, and the guardians of her peace and unity. But when such things are decreed by emperors against the parties who, having of their own accord brought forward accusations, were unable to substantiate them, and who, when a welcome back to the bosom of peace was offered to them on condition of their amendment, refused the terms, an outcry is raised that this is an unworthy wrong, and it is maintained that no one ought to be coerced to unity, and that evil should not be requited for evil to any one.

What else is this than what one of yourselves wrote: "What we wish is holy"? And in view of these things, it was not a great or difficult thing for you to reflect and discover how the decree and sentence of Constantine, which was published against you on the occasion of your predecessors so frequently bringing before the Emperor charges which they could not make good, should be in force against you; and how all succeeding emperors, especially those who are Catholic Christians, necessarily act according to it as often as the exigencies of your obstinacy make it necessary for them to take any measures in regard to you.

15. It was an easy thing for you to have reflected on these things, and perhaps some time to have said to yourselves: Seeing that Caecilianus either was innocent, or at least could not be proved guilty, what sin has the Christian Church spread so far and wide through the world committed in this matter? On what ground could it be unlawful for the Christian world to remain ignorant of that which even those who made it matter of accusation against others could not prove? Why should those whom Christ has sown in His field, that is, in this world, and has commanded to grow alongside of the tares until the harvest,—those many thousands of believers in all nations, whose multitude the Lord compared to the stars of heaven and the sand of the sea, to whom He promised of old, and has now given, the blessing in the seed of Abraham,—why, I ask, should the name of Christians be denied to all these, because, indeed, in regard to this case, in the discussion of which they took no part, they preferred to believe the judges, who under grave responsibility gave their decision, rather than the plaintiffs, against whom the decision was given? Surely no man's crime can stain with guilt another who does not know of its commission.

How could the faithful, scattered throughout the world, be aware of the crime of surrendering the sacred books as committed by men, whose guilt their accusers, even if they knew it, were at least unable to prove? Unquestionably

this one fact of ignorance on their part most easily demonstrates that they had no share in the guilt of this crime. Why then should the innocent be charged with crimes which they never committed, because of their being ignorant of crimes which, justly or unjustly, are laid to the charge of others? What room is left for innocence, if it is criminal for one to be ignorant of the crimes of others? Moreover, if the mere fact of their ignorance proves, as has been said, the innocence of the people in so many nations, how great is the crime of separation from the communion of these innocent people! For the deeds of guilty parties which either cannot be proved to those who are innocent, or cannot be believed by them, bring no stain upon any one, since, even when known, they are borne with in order to preserve fellowship with those who are innocent.

For the good are not to be deserted for the sake of the wicked, but the wicked are to be borne with for the sake of the good; as the prophets bore with those against whom they delivered such testimonies, and did not cease to take part in the sacraments of the Jewish people; as also our Lord bore with guilty Judas, even until he met the end which he deserved, and permitted him to take part in the sacred supper along with the innocent disciples; as the apostles bore with those who preached Christ through envy,—a sin peculiarly satanic; as Cyprian bore with colleagues guilty of avarice, which, after the example of the apostle, he calls idolatry.

Finally, whatever was done at that time among these bishops, although perhaps it was known by some of them, is, unless there be respect of persons in judgment, unknown to all: why, then, is not peace loved by all? These thoughts might easily occur to you; perhaps you already entertain them. But it would be better for you to be devoted to earthly possessions, through fear of losing which you might be proved to consent to known truth, than to be devoted to that worthless vainglory which you think you will by such consent forfeit in the estimation of men.

16. You now see therefore, I suppose, that the thing to be considered when any one is coerced, is not the mere fact of the coercion, but the nature of that to which he is coerced, whether it be good or bad: not that any one can be good in spite of his own will, but that, through fear of suffering what he does not desire, he either renounces his hostile prejudices, or is compelled to examine truth of which he had been contentedly ignorant; and under the influence of this fear repudiates the error which he was accustomed to defend, or seeks the truth of which he formerly knew nothing, and now willingly holds what he formerly rejected. Perhaps it would be utterly useless to assert this in words, if it were not demonstrated by so many examples. We see not a few men here and there, but many cities, once Donatist, now Catholic, vehemently detesting the diabolical schism, and ardently loving the unity of the Church; and these became Catholic under the influence of that fear which the laws of emperors inspire and

which is so offensive to you, from Constantine, before whom your party of their own accord impeached Caecilianus, down to the emperors of our own time, who most justly decree that the decision of the judge whom your own party chose, and whom they preferred to a tribunal of bishops, should be maintained in force against you.

17. I have therefore yielded to the evidence afforded by these instances which my colleagues have laid before me. For originally my opinion was, that no one should be coerced into the unity of Christ, that we must act only by words, fight only by arguments, and prevail by force of reason, lest we should have those whom we knew as avowed heretics feigning themselves to be Catholics. But this opinion of mine was overcome not by the words of those who controverted it, but by the conclusive instances to which they could point. For, in the first place, there was set over against my opinion my own town, which, although it was once wholly on the side of Donatus, was brought over to the Catholic unity by fear of the imperial edicts, but which we now see filled with such detestation of your ruinous perversity, that it would scarcely be believed that it had ever been involved in your error. There were so many others which were mentioned to me by name, that, from facts themselves, I was made to own that to this matter the word of Scripture might be understood as applying: “Give opportunity to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser.” For how many were already, as we assuredly know, willing to be Catholics, being moved by the indisputable plainness of truth, but daily putting off their avowal of this through fear of offending their own party!

How many were bound, not by truth—for you never pretended to that as yours—but by the heavy chains of inveterate custom, so that in them was fulfilled the divine saying: “A servant (who is hardened) will not be corrected by words; for though he understand, he will not answer”! How many supposed the sect of Donatus to be the true Church, merely because ease had made them too listless, or conceited, or sluggish, to take pains to examine Catholic truth! How many would have entered earlier had not the calumnies of slanderers, who declared that we offered something else than we do upon the altar of God, shut them out! How many, believing that it mattered not to which party a Christian might belong, remained in the schism of Donatus only because they had been born in it, and no one was compelling them to forsake it and pass over into the Catholic Church!

18. To all these classes of persons the dread of those laws in the promulgation of which kings serve the Lord in fear has been so useful, that now some say we were willing for this some time ago; but thanks be to God, who has given us occasion for doing it at once, and has cut off the hesitancy of procrastination! Others say: We already knew this to be true, but we were held prisoners by the force of old custom: thanks be to the Lord, who has broken these bonds asunder,

and has brought us into the bond of peace! Others say: We knew not that the truth was here, and we had no wish to learn it; but fear made us become earnest to examine it when we became alarmed, lest, without any gain in things eternal, we should be smitten with loss in temporal things: thanks be to the Lord, who has by the stimulus of fear startled us from our negligence, that now being disquieted we might inquire into those things which, when at ease, we did not care to know!

Others say: We were prevented from entering the Church by false reports, which we could not know to be false unless we entered it; and we would not enter unless we were compelled: thanks be to the Lord, who by His scourge took away our timid hesitation, and taught us to find out for ourselves how vain and absurd were the lies which rumor had spread abroad against His Church: by this we are persuaded that there is no truth in the accusations made by the authors of this heresy, since the more serious charges which their followers have invented are without foundation.

Others say: We thought, indeed, that it mattered not in what communion we held the faith of Christ; but thanks to the Lord, who has gathered us in from a state of schism, and has taught us that it is fitting that the one God be worshiped in unity.

19. Could I therefore maintain opposition to my colleagues, and by resisting them stand in the way of such conquests of the Lord, and prevent the sheep of Christ which were wandering on your mountains and hills—that is, on the swellings of your pride—from being gathered into the fold of peace, in which there is one flock and one Shepherd? Was it my duty to obstruct these measures, in order, indeed, that you might not lose what you call your own, and might without fear rob Christ of what is His: that you might frame your testaments according to Roman law, and might by calumnious accusations break the Testament made with the sanction of Divine law to the fathers, in which it was written, “In your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed”: that you might have freedom in your transactions in the way of buying and selling, and might be emboldened to divide and claim as your own that which Christ bought by giving Himself as its price: that any gift made over by one of you to another might remain unchallenged, and that the gift which the God of gods has bestowed upon His children, called from the rising of the sun to the going down of it, might become invalid: that you might not be sent into exile from the land of your natural birth, and that you might labor to banish Christ from the kingdom bought with His blood, which extends from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth?

No truly; let the kings of the earth serve Christ by making laws for Him and for His cause. Your predecessors exposed Caecilianus and his companions to be punished by the kings of the earth for crimes with which they were falsely

charged: let the lions now be turned to break in pieces the bones of the calumniators, and let no intercession for them be made by Daniel when he has been proved innocent, and set free from the den in which they meet their doom; for he that prepares a pit for his neighbor shall himself most justly fall into it.

Reading Notes

1. Letter 93, section 17, is Augustine’s explicit account of his change from relying on persuasion alone to accepting coercive laws. The accusations and reports of successful conversion in this letter remain Augustine’s testimony.

CHAPTER 21

Authority, Love, and Conscience

These letters address officials empowered to punish or use armed force. Augustine seeks to shape their conduct through Christian love while continuing to accept coercion itself.

Letter 133, written in 412 to Marcellinus, asks that men accused of killing and mutilating Catholic clergy be spared execution and bodily retaliation. Augustine distinguishes restraint and corrective discipline from the return of the same injuries. He favors measures leaving room for repentance, while accepting forms of physical discipline. The letter combines a determined intervention against lethal or mutilating punishment with coercive correction within the penal practices of his world.

Letter 189, written in 418 to the military official Boniface, joins counsel about love, prayer, and personal discipline to a defense of military service. Augustine makes peace the purpose of war. He requires fidelity to agreements, mercy toward the defeated, and restraint of the soldier's desires. An inward disposition toward peace operates within acceptance of the soldier's public role.

Together the letters place conscience within authority. Augustine's opposition to revenge, defense of punishment, language of love, and expectations of a Christian official stand beside one another with their differences intact.

Augustine

An Appeal Against Execution and Mutilation

Letter 133 · sections 1–3 and conclusion

1. I have learned that the Circumcelliones and clergy of the Donatist faction belonging to the district of Hippo, whom the guardians of public order had brought to trial for their deeds, have been examined by your Excellency, and that the most of them have confessed their share in the violent death which the presbyter Restitutus suffered at their hands, and in the beating of Innocentius, another Catholic presbyter, as well as in digging out the eye and cutting off the finger of the said Innocentius. This news has plunged me into the deepest anxiety, lest perhaps your Excellency should judge them worthy, according to the laws, of punishment not less severe than suffering in their own persons the same injuries as they have inflicted on others. Therefore I write this letter to implore you by your faith in Christ, and by the mercy of Christ the Lord Himself, in no way to do this or permit it to be done. For although we might silently pass over the execution of criminals who may be regarded as brought up for trial not

upon an accusation of ours, but by an indictment presented by those to whose vigilance the preservation of the public peace is entrusted, we do not wish to have the sufferings of the servants of God avenged by the infliction of precisely similar injuries in the way of retaliation.

Not, of course, that we object to the removal from these wicked men of the liberty to perpetrate further crimes; but our desire is rather that justice be satisfied without the taking of their lives or the maiming of their bodies in any part, and that, by such coercive measures as may be in accordance with the laws, they be turned from their insane frenzy to the quietness of men in their sound judgment, or compelled to give up mischievous violence and apply themselves to some useful labor. This is indeed called a penal sentence; but who does not see that when a restraint is put upon the boldness of savage violence, and the remedies fitted to produce repentance are not withdrawn, this discipline should be called a benefit rather than vindictive punishment?

2. Fulfill, Christian judge, the duty of an affectionate father; let your indignation against their crimes be tempered by considerations of humanity; be not provoked by the atrocity of their sinful deeds to gratify the passion of revenge, but rather be moved by the wounds which these deeds have inflicted on their own souls to exercise a desire to heal them. Do not lose now that fatherly care which you maintained when prosecuting the examination, in doing which you extracted the confession of such horrid crimes, not by stretching them on the rack, not by furrowing their flesh with iron claws, not by scorching them with flames, but by beating them with rods, a mode of correction used by schoolmasters, and by parents themselves in chastising children, and often also by bishops in the sentences awarded by them. Do not, therefore, now punish with extreme severity the crimes which you searched out with lenity. The necessity for harshness is greater in the investigation than in the infliction of punishment; for even the gentlest men use diligence and stringency in searching out a hidden crime, that they may find to whom they may show mercy. Therefore it is generally necessary to use more rigor in making inquisition, so that when the crime has been brought to light, there may be scope for displaying clemency.

For all good works love to be set in the light, not in order to obtain glory from men, but, as the Lord says, “that they seeing your good works may glorify your Father who is in heaven.” And, for the same reason, the apostle was not satisfied with merely exhorting us to practice moderation, but also commands us to make it known: “Let your moderation,” he says, “be known to all men;” and in another place, “Showing all meekness to all men.” Hence, also, that most signal forbearance of the holy David, when he mercifully spared his enemy when delivered into his hand, would not have been so conspicuous had not his power to act otherwise been manifest. Therefore let not the power of executing vengeance inspire you with harshness, seeing that the necessity of examining

the criminals did not make you lay aside your clemency. Do not call for the executioner now when the crime has been found out, after having forborne from calling in the tormentor when you were finding it out.

3. Finally, you have been sent here for the benefit of the Church. I solemnly declare that what I recommend is expedient in the interests of the Catholic Church, or, that I may not seem to pass beyond the boundaries of my own charge, I protest that it is for the good of the Church belonging to the diocese of Hippo. If you do not hearken to me asking this favor as a friend, hearken to me offering this counsel as a bishop; although, indeed, it would not be presumption for me to say—since I am addressing a Christian, and especially in such a case as this—that it becomes you to hearken to me as a bishop commanding with authority, my noble and justly distinguished lord and much-loved son. I am aware that the principal charge of law cases connected with the affairs of the Church has been devolved on your Excellency, but as I believe that this particular case belongs to the very illustrious and honorable proconsul, I have written a letter to him also, which I beg you not to refuse to give to him, or, if necessary, recommend to his attention; and I entreat you both not to resent our intercession, or counsel, or anxiety, as officious.

And let not the sufferings of Catholic servants of God, which ought to be useful in the spiritual upbuilding of the weak, be sullied by the retaliation of injuries on those who did them wrong, but rather, tempering the rigor of justice, let it be your care as sons of the Church to commend both your own faith and your Mother’s clemency.

May almighty God enrich your Excellency with all good things, my noble and justly distinguished lord and dearly beloved son!

Counsel to a Soldier on Love and Peace

Letter 189 · sections 1–8 and conclusion

1. I had already written a reply to your Love, but while I was waiting for an opportunity of forwarding the letter, my beloved son Faustus arrived here on his way to your Excellency. After he had received the letter which I had intended to be carried by him to your Benevolence, he stated to me that you were very desirous that I should write you something which might build you up to the eternal salvation of which you have hope in Christ Jesus our Lord. And, although I was busily occupied at the time, he insisted, with an earnestness corresponding to the love which, as you know, he bears to you, that I should do this without delay. To meet his convenience, therefore, as he was in haste to depart, I thought it better to write, though necessarily without much time for reflection, rather than put off the gratification of your pious desire, my noble lord and justly distinguished and honorable son.

2. All is contained in these brief sentences: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength: and love your neighbor as yourself;” for these are the words in which the Lord, when on earth, gave an epitome of religion, saying in the gospel, “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” Daily advance, then, in this love, both by praying and by well-doing, that through the help of Him, who enjoined it on you, and whose gift it is, it may be nourished and increased, until, being perfected, it render you perfect. “For this is the love which,” as the apostle says, “is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, which is given to us.” This is “the fulfilling of the law;” this is the same love by which faith works, of which he says again, “Neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith, which works by love.”

3. In this love, then, all our holy fathers, patriarchs, prophets, and apostles pleased God. In this all true martyrs contended against the devil even to the shedding of blood, and because in them it neither waxed cold nor failed, they became conquerors. In this all true believers daily make progress, seeking to acquire not an earthly kingdom, but the kingdom of heaven; not a temporal, but an eternal inheritance; not gold and silver, but the incorruptible riches of the angels; not the good things of this life, which are enjoyed with trembling, and which no one can take with him when he dies, but the vision of God, whose grace and power of imparting felicity transcend all beauty of form in bodies not only on earth but also in heaven, transcend all spiritual loveliness in men, however just and holy, transcend all the glory of the angels and powers of the world above, transcend not only all that language can express, but all that thought can imagine concerning Him. And let us not despair of the fulfillment of such a great promise because it is exceeding great, but rather believe that we shall receive it because He who has promised it is exceeding great, as the blessed Apostle John says: “Now are we the sons of God; and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.”

4. Do not think that it is impossible for any one to please God while engaged in active military service. Among such persons was the holy David, to whom God gave so great a testimony; among them also were many righteous men of that time; among them was also that centurion who said to the Lord: “I am not worthy that You should come under my roof, but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed: for I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goes; and to another, Come, and he comes; and to my servant, Do this, and he does it;” and concerning whom the Lord said: “Truly, I say to you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.” Among them was that Cornelius to whom an angel said: “Cornelius, your alms are accepted, and your prayers are heard,” when he directed him to send to the

blessed Apostle Peter, and to hear from him what he ought to do, to which apostle he sent a devout soldier, requesting him to come to him.

Among them were also the soldiers who, when they had come to be baptized by John,—the sacred forerunner of the Lord, and the friend of the Bridegroom, of whom the Lord says: “Among them that are born of women there has not arisen a greater than John the Baptist,”—and had inquired of him what they should do, received the answer, “Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.” Certainly he did not prohibit them to serve as soldiers when he commanded them to be content with their pay for the service.

5. They occupy indeed a higher place before God who, abandoning all these secular employments, serve Him with the strictest chastity; but “every one,” as the apostle says, “has his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that.” Some, then, in praying for you, fight against your invisible enemies; you, in fighting for them, contend against the barbarians, their visible enemies. Would that one faith existed in all, for then there would be less weary struggling, and the devil with his angels would be more easily conquered; but since it is necessary in this life that the citizens of the kingdom of heaven should be subjected to temptations among erring and impious men, that they may be exercised, and “tried as gold in the furnace,” we ought not before the appointed time to desire to live with those alone who are holy and righteous, so that, by patience, we may deserve to receive this blessedness in its proper time.

6. Think, then, of this first of all, when you are arming for the battle, that even your bodily strength is a gift of God; for, considering this, you will not employ the gift of God against God. For, when faith is pledged, it is to be kept even with the enemy against whom the war is waged, how much more with the friend for whom the battle is fought! Peace should be the object of your desire; war should be waged only as a necessity, and waged only that God may by it deliver men from the necessity and preserve them in peace. For peace is not sought in order to the kindling of war, but war is waged in order that peace may be obtained. Therefore, even in waging war, cherish the spirit of a peacemaker, that, by conquering those whom you attack, you may lead them back to the advantages of peace; for our Lord says: “Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God.” If, however, peace among men be so sweet as procuring temporal safety, how much sweeter is that peace with God which procures for men the eternal felicity of the angels!

Let necessity, therefore, and not your will, slay the enemy who fights against you. As violence is used towards him who rebels and resists, so mercy is due to the vanquished or the captive, especially in the case in which future troubling of the peace is not to be feared.

7. Let the manner of your life be adorned by chastity, sobriety, and moderation; for it is exceedingly disgraceful that lust should subdue him whom

man finds invincible, and that wine should overpower him whom the sword assails in vain. As to worldly riches, if you do not possess them, let them not be sought after on earth by doing evil; and if you possess them, let them by good works be laid up in heaven. The manly and Christian spirit ought neither to be elated by the accession, nor crushed by the loss of this world’s treasures. Let us rather think of what the Lord says: “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also;” and certainly, when we hear the exhortation to lift up our hearts, it is our duty to give unfeignedly the response which you know that we are accustomed to give.

8. In these things, indeed, I know that you are very careful, and the good report which I hear of you fills me with great delight, and moves me to congratulate you on account of it in the Lord. This letter, therefore, may serve rather as a mirror in which you may see what you are, than as a directory from which to learn what you ought to be: nevertheless, whatever you may discover, either from this letter or from the Holy Scriptures, to be still wanting to you in regard to a holy life, persevere in urgently seeking it both by effort and by prayer; and for the things which you have, give thanks to God as the Fountain of goodness, from where you have received them; in every good action let the glory be given to God, and humility be exercised by you, for, as it is written, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights.” But however much you may advance in the love of God and of your neighbor, and in true piety, do not imagine, as long as you are in this life, that you are without sin, for concerning this we read in Holy Scripture: “Is not the life of man upon earth a life of temptation?” Therefore, since always, as long as you are in this body, it is necessary for you to say in prayer, as the Lord taught us: “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,” remember quickly to forgive, if any one shall do you wrong and shall ask pardon from you, that you may be able to pray sincerely, and may prevail in seeking pardon for your own sins.

These things, my beloved friend, I have written to you in haste, as the anxiety of the bearer to depart urged me not to detain him; but I thank God that I have in some measure complied with your pious wish. May the mercy of God ever protect you, my noble lord and justly distinguished son.

Reading Notes

1. The salutations and date headings are omitted from the source letters. Their numbered sections and concluding blessings or remarks are retained. In Letter 133, the preservation of life is combined with forms of discipline Augustine accepted; the selection does not convert that position into a modern rejection of corporal punishment.

PART VIII

Peace and Ultimate Hope

Augustine's account of human community begins with what people love. A people can be recognized through the objects of its common concern, and the direction of love shapes the purposes for which its members seek agreement, authority, security, and peace. The distinction between the earthly and heavenly cities therefore reaches beneath political boundaries to the desires organizing a shared life.

The readings in this part move from those loves to the conditions of earthly peace and finally to Augustine's account of resurrection and fulfillment. They preserve his conviction that even damaged communities desire some form of peace, while showing how strongly his descriptions of household and civil order belong to his historical setting. His discussion includes slavery, obedience, and correction as well as mutual service and the common goods of mortal life.

The final reading turns toward the life of the resurrected person. Augustine considers the transformed body, the vision of God, memory, freedom, and the rest promised to the saints. His hope concerns a fulfilled community of persons whose love and knowledge have reached their proper end. These closing passages allow the reader to see how his reflections on mind, conduct, time, and society converge in a theological account of ultimate happiness.

CHAPTER 22

The Two Cities

The distinction between Augustine's two cities is introduced here through a brief passage from Book XIV. Its organizing principle is love: the self can become the measure of all things, or it can be ordered toward God. Augustine relates that difference to glory, service, dependence, and the uses of power. The cities are therefore more than the names of two visible political organizations. Their defining loyalties can run through institutions and communities whose outward membership appears straightforward.

The accompanying passages from Book XIX ask how a people should be defined. Augustine proposes attention to the things its members love in common. This permits him to speak meaningfully about the Roman people and other societies while still judging their loves and their claims to justice. It also clarifies why social agreement alone cannot settle the question of a community's ultimate good.

His account of virtue remains explicitly theological. The final selected chapter argues that virtues which do not refer their good to God cannot fulfill their proper purpose. Readers should hear the strength of that claim in Augustine's own terms. It is part of his account of the highest good and is not merely a convenient label for the political preferences of a particular community.

These compact readings establish the distinction needed for the longer examination of peace that follows. They invite the reader to consider both the shared loves that make common life possible and the judgments by which those loves are ranked.

Augustine

Two Cities Formed by Two Loves

The City of God · Book XIV, chapter 28

Accordingly, two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. The former, in a word, glories in itself, the latter in the Lord. For the one seeks glory from men; but the greatest glory of the other is God, the witness of conscience. The one lifts up its head in its own glory; the other says to its God, “You are my glory, and the lifter up of my head.” In the one, the princes and the nations it subdues are ruled by the love of ruling; in the other, the princes and the subjects serve one another in love, the latter obeying, while the former take thought for all. The one delights in its own strength, represented in the persons of its rulers; the other says to its God, “I will love You, O Lord, my strength.” And therefore the wise men of the one city, living according to man,

have sought for profit to their own bodies or souls, or both, and those who have known God “glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened; professing themselves to be wise,”—that is, glorying in their own wisdom, and being possessed by pride,—“they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.” For they were either leaders or followers of the people in adoring images, “and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever.” But in the other city there is no human wisdom, but only godliness, which offers due worship to the true God, and looks for its reward in the society of the saints, of holy angels as well as holy men, “that God may be all in all.”

A People and Its Common Loves

The City of God · Book XIX, chapters 24–25

But if we discard this definition of a people, and, assuming another, say that a people is an assemblage of reasonable beings bound together by a common agreement as to the objects of their love, then, in order to discover the character of any people, we have only to observe what they love. Yet whatever it loves, if only it is an assemblage of reasonable beings and not of beasts, and is bound together by an agreement as to the objects of love, it is reasonably called a people; and it will be a superior people in proportion as it is bound together by higher interests, inferior in proportion as it is bound together by lower. According to this definition of ours, the Roman people is a people, and its weal is without doubt a commonwealth or republic. But what its tastes were in its early and subsequent days, and how it declined into sanguinary seditions and then to social and civil wars, and so burst asunder or rotted off the bond of concord in which the health of a people consists, history shows, and in the preceding books I have related at large.

And yet I would not on this account say either that it was not a people, or that its administration was not a republic, so long as there remains an assemblage of reasonable beings bound together by a common agreement as to the objects of love. But what I say of this people and of this republic I must be understood to think and say of the Athenians or any Greek state, of the Egyptians, of the early Assyrian Babylon, and of every other nation, great or small, which had a public government. For, in general, the city of the ungodly, which did not obey the command of God that it should offer no sacrifice save to Him alone, and which, therefore, could not give to the soul its proper command over the body, nor to the reason its just authority over the vices, is void of true justice.

For though the soul may seem to rule the body admirably, and the reason the vices, if the soul and reason do not themselves obey God, as God has

commanded them to serve Him, they have no proper authority over the body and the vices. For what kind of mistress of the body and the vices can that mind be which is ignorant of the true God, and which, instead of being subject to His authority, is prostituted to the corrupting influences of the most vicious demons? It is for this reason that the virtues which it seems to itself to possess, and by which it restrains the body and the vices that it may obtain and keep what it desires, are rather vices than virtues so long as there is no reference to God in the matter. For although some suppose that virtues which have a reference only to themselves, and are desired only on their own account, are yet true and genuine virtues, the fact is that even then they are inflated with pride, and are therefore to be reckoned vices rather than virtues. For as that which gives life to the flesh is not derived from flesh, but is above it, so that which gives blessed life to man is not derived from man, but is something above him; and what I say of man is true of every celestial power and virtue whatever.

Reading Notes

1. The selections are complete chapters: The City of God XIV.28 and XIX.24–25. Their juxtaposition is editorial; the passages are separated by several books in Augustine’s original work.

CHAPTER 23

The Order of Peace

Peace is desired even by people whose actions disturb the peace of others. Augustine begins with that paradox and examines the limited agreements sought by conquerors, robbers, households, and political communities. Their aims differ in justice and scope, yet each seeks some arrangement in which its own purposes can be carried out without resistance. The universality of that desire helps explain both the value of peace and the danger of allowing a narrow interest to define it.

Augustine describes peace through ordered relationships: within the body, between bodily life and the soul, among human beings, and between the creature and God. His account of a household places responsibility on those who govern it, and he presents the exercise of care as a form of service. The discussion also contains assumptions about hierarchy that present readers will need to examine directly.

The passage on slavery is especially important. Augustine denies that humanity was created for human domination of this kind and associates slavery with sin, yet he also instructs people living within the institution to fulfill their assigned duties. His argument holds together an account of original human freedom and an accommodation to an inherited social order. The complete sequence is retained so that this tension remains visible.

The concluding chapter explains how the heavenly city makes use of earthly peace during its pilgrimage. Shared necessities permit cooperation across profound religious differences. Augustine values that provisional peace while locating the community's final good beyond the conditions any earthly arrangement can secure.

Augustine

Peace in the Person Household and City

The City of God · Book XIX, chapters 12–17

Whoever gives even moderate attention to human affairs and to our common nature, will recognize that if there is no man who does not wish to be joyful, neither is there any one who does not wish to have peace. For even they who make war desire nothing but victory,—desire, that is to say, to attain to peace with glory. For what else is victory than the conquest of those who resist us? and when this is done there is peace. It is therefore with the desire for peace that wars are waged, even by those who take pleasure in exercising their warlike nature in command and battle. And hence it is obvious that peace is the end sought for by war. For every man seeks peace by waging war, but no man seeks war by making peace. For even they who intentionally interrupt the peace in

which they are living have no hatred of peace, but only wish it changed into a peace that suits them better. They do not, therefore, wish to have no peace, but only one more to their mind.

And in the case of sedition, when men have separated themselves from the community, they yet do not effect what they wish, unless they maintain some kind of peace with their fellow-conspirators. And therefore even robbers take care to maintain peace with their comrades, that they may with greater effect and greater safety invade the peace of other men. And if an individual happen to be of such unrivalled strength, and to be so jealous of partnership, that he trusts himself with no comrades, but makes his own plots, and commits depredations and murders on his own account, yet he maintains some shadow of peace with such persons as he is unable to kill, and from whom he wishes to conceal his deeds. In his own home, too, he makes it his aim to be at peace with his wife and children, and any other members of his household; for unquestionably their prompt obedience to his every look is a source of pleasure to him. And if this be not rendered, he is angry, he chides and punishes; and even by this storm he secures the calm peace of his own home, as occasion demands.

For he sees that peace cannot be maintained unless all the members of the same domestic circle be subject to one head, such as he himself is in his own house. And therefore if a city or nation offered to submit itself to him, to serve him in the same style as he had made his household serve him, he would no longer lurk in a brigand’s hiding-places, but lift his head in open day as a king, though the same coveteousness and wicked ness should remain in him. And thus all men desire to have peace with their own circle whom they wish to govern as suits themselves. For even those whom they make war against they wish to make their own, and impose on them the laws of their own peace.

But let us suppose a man such as poetry and mythology speak of,—a man so insociable and savage as to be called rather a semi-man than a man. Although, then, his kingdom was the solitude of a dreary cave, and he himself was so singularly bad-hearted that he was named Κακός, which is the Greek word for bad; though he had no wife to soothe him with endearing talk, no children to play with, no sons to do his bidding, no friend to enliven him with intercourse, not even his father Vulcan (though in one respect he was happier than his father, not having begotten a monster like himself); although he gave to no man, but took as he wished whatever he could, from whomever he could, when he could yet in that solitary den, the floor of which, as Virgil says, was always reeking with recent slaughter, there was nothing else than peace sought, a peace in which no one should molest him, or disquiet him with any assault or alarm. With his own body he desired to be at peace, and he was satisfied only in proportion as he had this peace.

For he ruled his members, and they obeyed him; and for the sake of pacifying his mortal nature, which rebelled when it needed anything, and of allaying the sedition of hunger which threatened to banish the soul from the body, he made forays, slew, and devoured, but used the ferocity and savageness he displayed in these actions only for the preservation of his own life's peace. So that, had he been willing to make with other men the same peace which he made with himself in his own cave, he would neither have been called bad, nor a monster, nor a semi-man. Or if the appearance of his body and his vomiting smoky fires frightened men from having any dealings with him, perhaps his fierce ways arose not from a desire to do mischief, but from the necessity of finding a living. But he may have had no existence, or, at least, he was not such as the poets fancifully describe him, for they had to exalt Hercules, and did so at the expense of Cacus. It is better, then, to believe that such a man or semi-man never existed, and that this, in common with many other fancies of the poets, is mere fiction.

For the most savage animals (and he is said to have been almost a wild beast) encompass their own species with a ring of protecting peace. They cohabit, beget, produce, suckle, and bring up their young, though very many of them are not gregarious, but solitary,—not like sheep, deer, pigeons, starlings, bees, but such as lions, foxes, eagles, bats. For what tigress does not gently purr over her cubs, and lay aside her ferocity to fondle them? What kite, solitary as he is when circling over his prey, does not seek a mate, build a nest, hatch the eggs, bring up the young birds, and maintain with the mother of his family as peaceful a domestic alliance as he can? How much more powerfully do the laws of man's nature move him to hold fellowship and maintain peace with all men so far as in him lies, since even wicked men wage war to maintain the peace of their own circle, and wish that, if possible, all men belonged to them, that all men and things might serve but one head, and might, either through love or fear, yield themselves to peace with him!

It is thus that pride in its perversity apes God. It abhors equality with other men under Him; but, instead of His rule, it seeks to impose a rule of its own upon its equals. It abhors, that is to say, the just peace of God, and loves its own unjust peace; but it cannot help loving peace of one kind or other. For there is no vice so clean contrary to nature that it obliterates even the faintest traces of nature.

He, then, who prefers what is right to what is wrong, and what is well-ordered to what is perverted, sees that the peace of unjust men is not worthy to be called peace in comparison with the peace of the just. And yet even what is perverted must of necessity be in harmony with, and in dependence on, and in some part of the order of things, for otherwise it would have no existence at all. Suppose a man hangs with his head downwards, this is certainly a perverted attitude of body and arrangement of its members; for that which nature requires to be

above is beneath, and vice versâ. This perversity disturbs the peace of the body, and is therefore painful. Nevertheless the spirit is at peace with its body, and labors for its preservation, and hence the suffering; but if it is banished from the body by its pains, then, so long as the bodily framework holds together, there is in the remains a kind of peace among the members, and hence the body remains suspended. And inasmuch as the earthly body tends toward the earth, and rests on the bond by which it is suspended, it tends thus to its natural peace, and the voice of its own weight demands a place for it to rest; and though now lifeless and without feeling, it does not fall from the peace that is natural to its place in creation, whether it already has it, or is tending toward it.

For if you apply embalming preparations to prevent the bodily frame from moldering and dissolving, a kind of peace still unites part to part, and keeps the whole body in a suitable place on the earth,—in other words, in a place that is at peace with the body. If, on the other hand, the body receive no such care, but be left to the natural course, it is disturbed by exhalations that do not harmonize with one another, and that offend our senses; for it is this which is perceived in putrefaction until it is assimilated to the elements of the world, and particle by particle enters into peace with them. Yet throughout this process the laws of the most high Creator and Governor are strictly observed, for it is by Him the peace of the universe is administered. For although minute animals are produced from the carcass of a larger animal, all these little atoms, by the law of the same Creator, serve the animals they belong to in peace. And although the flesh of dead animals be eaten by others, no matter where it be carried, nor what it be brought into contact with, nor what it be converted and changed into, it still is ruled by the same laws which pervade all things for the conservation of every mortal race, and which bring things that fit one another into harmony.

The peace of the body then consists in the duly proportioned arrangement of its parts. The peace of the irrational soul is the harmonious repose of the appetites, and that of the rational soul the harmony of knowledge and action. The peace of body and soul is the well-ordered and harmonious life and health of the living creature. Peace between man and God is the well-ordered obedience of faith to eternal law. Peace between man and man is well-ordered concord. Domestic peace is the well-ordered concord between those of the family who rule and those who obey. Civil peace is a similar concord among the citizens. The peace of the celestial city is the perfectly ordered and harmonious enjoyment of God, and of one another in God. The peace of all things is the tranquility of order. Order is the distribution which allots things equal and unequal, each to its own place. And hence, though the miserable, in so far as they are such, do certainly not enjoy peace, but are severed from that tranquility of order in which there is no disturbance, nevertheless, inasmuch as they are deservedly and justly miserable, they are by their very misery connected with order.

They are not, indeed, conjoined with the blessed, but they are disjoined from them by the law of order. And though they are disquieted, their circumstances are notwithstanding adjusted to them, and consequently they have some tranquility of order, and therefore some peace. But they are wretched because, although not wholly miserable, they are not in that place where any mixture of misery is impossible. They would, however, be more wretched if they had not that peace which arises from being in harmony with the natural order of things. When they suffer, their peace is in so far disturbed; but their peace continues in so far as they do not suffer, and in so far as their nature continues to exist. As, then, there may be life without pain, while there cannot be pain without some kind of life, so there may be peace without war, but there cannot be war without some kind of peace, because war supposes the existence of some natures to wage it, and these natures cannot exist without peace of one kind or other.

And therefore there is a nature in which evil does not or even cannot exist; but there cannot be a nature in which there is no good. Hence not even the nature of the devil himself is evil, in so far as it is nature, but it was made evil by being perverted. Thus he did not abide in the truth, but could not escape the judgment of the Truth; he did not abide in the tranquility of order, but did not therefore escape the power of the Ordainer. The good imparted by God to his nature did not screen him from the justice of God by which order was preserved in his punishment; neither did God punish the good which He had created, but the evil which the devil had committed. God did not take back all He had imparted to his nature, but something He took and something He left, that there might remain enough to be sensible of the loss of what was taken. And this very sensibility to pain is evidence of the good which has been taken away and the good which has been left.

For, were nothing good left, there could be no pain on account of the good which had been lost. For he who sins is still worse if he rejoices in his loss of righteousness. But he who is in pain, if he derives no benefit from it, mourns at least the loss of health. And as righteousness and health are both good things, and as the loss of any good thing is matter of grief, not of joy,—if, at least, there is no compensation, as spiritual righteousness may compensate for the loss of bodily health,—certainly it is more suitable for a wicked man to grieve in punishment than to rejoice in his fault. As, then, the joy of a sinner who has abandoned what is good is evidence of a bad will, so his grief for the good he has lost when he is punished is evidence of a good nature. For he who laments the peace his nature has lost is stirred to do so by some relics of peace which make his nature friendly to itself. And it is very just that in the final punishment the wicked and godless should in anguish bewail the loss of the natural advantages they enjoyed, and should perceive that they were most justly taken from them by that God whose benign liberality they had despised.

God, then, the most wise Creator and most just Ordainer of all natures, who placed the human race upon earth as its greatest ornament, imparted to men some good things adapted to this life, to wit, temporal peace, such as we can enjoy in this life from health and safety and human fellowship, and all things needful for the preservation and recovery of this peace, such as the objects which are accommodated to our outward senses, light, night, the air, and waters suitable for us, and everything the body requires to sustain, shelter, heal, or beautify it: and all under this most equitable condition, that every man who made a good use of these advantages suited to the peace of this mortal condition, should receive ampler and better blessings, namely, the peace of immortality, accompanied by glory and honor in an endless life made fit for the enjoyment of God and of one another in God; but that he who used the present blessings badly should both lose them and should not receive the others.

The whole use, then, of things temporal has a reference to this result of earthly peace in the earthly community, while in the city of God it is connected with eternal peace. And therefore, if we were irrational animals, we should desire nothing beyond the proper arrangement of the parts of the body and the satisfaction of the appetites,—nothing, therefore, but bodily comfort and abundance of pleasures, that the peace of the body might contribute to the peace of the soul. For if bodily peace be awanting, a bar is put to the peace even of the irrational soul, since it cannot obtain the gratification of its appetites. And these two together help out the mutual peace of soul and body, the peace of harmonious life and health. For as animals, by shunning pain, show that they love bodily peace, and, by pursuing pleasure to gratify their appetites, show that they love peace of soul, so their shrinking from death is a sufficient indication of their intense love of that peace which binds soul and body in close alliance. But, as man has a rational soul, he subordinates all this which he has in common with the beasts to the peace of his rational soul, that his intellect may have free play and may regulate his actions, and that he may thus enjoy the well-ordered harmony of knowledge and action which constitutes, as we have said, the peace of the rational soul.

And for this purpose he must desire to be neither molested by pain, nor disturbed by desire, nor extinguished by death, that he may arrive at some useful knowledge by which he may regulate his life and manners. But, owing to the liability of the human mind to fall into mistakes, this very pursuit of knowledge may be a snare to him unless he has a divine Master, whom he may obey without misgiving, and who may at the same time give him such help as to preserve his own freedom. And because, so long as he is in this mortal body, he is a stranger to God, he walks by faith, not by sight; and he therefore refers all peace, bodily or spiritual or both, to that peace which mortal man has with the immortal God, so that he exhibits the well-ordered obedience of faith to eternal

law. But as this divine Master inculcates two precepts,—the love of God and the love of our neighbor,—and as in these precepts a man finds three things he has to love,—God, himself, and his neighbor,—and that he who loves God loves himself by that, it follows that he must endeavor to get his neighbor to love God, since he is ordered to love his neighbor as himself.

He ought to make this endeavor in behalf of his wife, his children, his household, all within his reach, even as he would wish his neighbor to do the same for him if he needed it; and consequently he will be at peace, or in well-ordered concord, with all men, as far as in him lies. And this is the order of this concord, that a man, in the first place, injure no one, and, in the second, do good to every one he can reach. Primarily, therefore, his own household are his care, for the law of nature and of society gives him readier access to them and greater opportunity of serving them. And hence the apostle says, “Now, if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” This is the origin of domestic peace, or the well-ordered concord of those in the family who rule and those who obey. For they who care for the rest rule,—the husband the wife, the parents the children, the masters the servants; and they who are cared for obey,—the women their husbands, the children their parents, the servants their masters.

But in the family of the just man who lives by faith and is as yet a pilgrim journeying on to the celestial city, even those who rule serve those whom they seem to command; for they rule not from a love of power, but from a sense of the duty they owe to others—not because they are proud of authority, but because they love mercy.

This is prescribed by the order of nature: it is thus that God has created man. For “let them,” He says, “have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every creeping thing which creeps on the earth.” He did not intend that His rational creature, who was made in His image, should have dominion over anything but the irrational creation,—not man over man, but man over the beasts. And hence the righteous men in primitive times were made shepherds of cattle rather than kings of men, God intending thus to teach us what the relative position of the creatures is, and what the desert of sin; for it is with justice, we believe, that the condition of slavery is the result of sin. And this is why we do not find the word “slave” in any part of Scripture until righteous Noah branded the sin of his son with this name. It is a name, therefore, introduced by sin and not by nature. The origin of the Latin word for slave is supposed to be found in the circumstance that those who by the law of war were liable to be killed were sometimes preserved by their victors, and were hence called servants.

And these circumstances could never have arisen save through sin. For even when we wage a just war, our adversaries must be sinning; and every victory,

even though gained by wicked men, is a result of the first judgment of God, who humbles the vanquished either for the sake of removing or of punishing their sins. Witness that man of God, Daniel, who, when he was in captivity, confessed to God his own sins and the sins of his people, and declares with pious grief that these were the cause of the captivity. The prime cause, then, of slavery is sin, which brings man under the dominion of his fellow,—that which does not happen save by the judgment of God, with whom is no unrighteousness, and who knows how to award fit punishments to every variety of offense. But our Master in heaven says, “Every one who does sin is the servant of sin.” And thus there are many wicked masters who have religious men as their slaves, and who are yet themselves in bondage; “for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.” And beyond question it is a happier thing to be the slave of a man than of a lust; for even this very lust of ruling, to mention no others, lays waste men’s hearts with the most ruthless dominion.

Moreover, when men are subjected to one another in a peaceful order, the lowly position does as much good to the servant as the proud position does harm to the master. But by nature, as God first created us, no one is the slave either of man or of sin. This servitude is, however, penal, and is appointed by that law which enjoins the preservation of the natural order and forbids its disturbance; for if nothing had been done in violation of that law, there would have been nothing to restrain by penal servitude. And therefore the apostle admonishes slaves to be subject to their masters, and to serve them heartily and with good-will, so that, if they cannot be freed by their masters, they may themselves make their slavery in some sort free, by serving not in crafty fear, but in faithful love, until all unrighteousness pass away, and all principality and every human power be brought to nothing, and God be all in all.

And therefore, although our righteous fathers had slaves, and administered their domestic affairs so as to distinguish between the condition of slaves and the heirship of sons in regard to the blessings of this life, yet in regard to the worship of God, in whom we hope for eternal blessings, they took an equally loving oversight of all the members of their household. And this is so much in accordance with the natural order, that the head of the household was called paterfamilias; and this name has been so generally accepted, that even those whose rule is unrighteous are glad to apply it to themselves. But those who are true fathers of their households desire and endeavor that all the members of their household, equally with their own children, should worship and win God, and should come to that heavenly home in which the duty of ruling men is no longer necessary, because the duty of caring for their everlasting happiness has also ceased; but, until they reach that home, masters ought to feel their position of authority a greater burden than servants their service.

And if any member of the family interrupts the domestic peace by disobedience, he is corrected either by word or blow, or some kind of just and legitimate punishment, such as society permits, that he may himself be the better for it, and be readjusted to the family harmony from which he had dislocated himself. For as it is not benevolent to give a man help at the expense of some greater benefit he might receive, so it is not innocent to spare a man at the risk of his falling into graver sin. To be innocent, we must not only do harm to no man, but also restrain him from sin or punish his sin, so that either the man himself who is punished may profit by his experience, or others be warned by his example. Since, then, the house ought to be the beginning or element of the city, and every beginning bears reference to some end of its own kind, and every element to the integrity of the whole of which it is an element, it follows plainly enough that domestic peace has a relation to civic peace,—in other words, that the well-ordered concord of domestic obedience and domestic rule has a relation to the well-ordered concord of civic obedience and civic rule.

And therefore it follows, further, that the father of the family ought to frame his domestic rule in accordance with the law of the city, so that the household may be in harmony with the civic order.

But the families which do not live by faith seek their peace in the earthly advantages of this life; while the families which live by faith look for those eternal blessings which are promised, and use as pilgrims such advantages of time and of earth as do not fascinate and divert them from God, but rather aid them to endure with greater ease, and to keep down the number of those burdens of the corruptible body which weigh upon the soul. Thus the things necessary for this mortal life are used by both kinds of men and families alike, but each has its own peculiar and widely different aim in using them. The earthly city, which does not live by faith, seeks an earthly peace, and the end it proposes, in the well-ordered concord of civic obedience and rule, is the combination of men’s wills to attain the things which are helpful to this life. The heavenly city, or rather the part of it which sojourns on earth and lives by faith, makes use of this peace only because it must, until this mortal condition which necessitates it shall pass away.

Consequently, so long as it lives like a captive and a stranger in the earthly city, though it has already received the promise of redemption, and the gift of the Spirit as the earnest of it, it makes no scruple to obey the laws of the earthly city, by which the things necessary for the maintenance of this mortal life are administered; and thus, as this life is common to both cities, so there is a harmony between them in regard to what belongs to it. But, as the earthly city has had some philosophers whose doctrine is condemned by the divine teaching, and who, being deceived either by their own conjectures or by demons, supposed that many gods must be invited to take an interest in human affairs,

and assigned to each a separate function and a separate department,—to one the body, to another the soul; and in the body itself, to one the head, to another the neck, and each of the other members to one of the gods; and in like manner, in the soul, to one god the natural capacity was assigned, to another education, to another anger, to another lust; and so the various affairs of life were assigned,—cattle to one, corn to another, wine to another, oil to another, the woods to another, money to another, navigation to another, wars and victories to another, marriages to another, births and fecundity to another, and other things to other gods: and as the celestial city, on the other hand, knew that one God only was to be worshiped, and that to Him alone was due that service which the Greeks call λατρεία, and which can be given only to a god, it has come to pass that the two cities could not have common laws of religion, and that the heavenly city has been compelled in this matter to dissent, and to become obnoxious to those who think differently, and to stand the brunt of their anger and hatred and persecutions, except in so far as the minds of their enemies have been alarmed by the multitude of the Christians and quelled by the manifest protection of God accorded to them.

This heavenly city, then, while it sojourns on earth, calls citizens out of all nations, and gathers together a society of pilgrims of all languages, not scrupling about diversities in the manners, laws, and institutions by which earthly peace is secured and maintained, but recognizing that, however various these are, they all tend to one and the same end of earthly peace. It therefore is so far from rescinding and abolishing these diversities, that it even preserves and adopts them, so long only as no hindrance to the worship of the one supreme and true God is thus introduced. Even the heavenly city, therefore, while in its state of pilgrimage, avails itself of the peace of earth, and, so far as it can without injuring faith and godliness, desires and maintains a common agreement among men regarding the acquisition of the necessaries of life, and makes this earthly peace bear upon the peace of heaven; for this alone can be truly called and esteemed the peace of the reasonable creatures, consisting as it does in the perfectly ordered and harmonious enjoyment of God and of one another in God.

When we shall have reached that peace, this mortal life shall give place to one that is eternal, and our body shall be no more this animal body which by its corruption weighs down the soul, but a spiritual body feeling no want, and in all its members subjected to the will. In its pilgrim state the heavenly city possesses this peace by faith; and by this faith it lives righteously when it refers to the attainment of that peace every good action toward God and man; for the life of the city is a social life.

Reading Notes

1. This reading contains The City of God XIX.12–17 as a continuous sequence. Its treatment of slavery and household authority is retained as part of the historical argument. The editorial introduction describes the tension in that argument without converting Augustine’s accommodation into an endorsement by this edition.

CHAPTER 24

Resurrection and Rest

The final two chapters of The City of God ask what the life of the saints will be like when its promised fulfillment has arrived. Augustine moves carefully between affirmation and uncertainty. He insists on the resurrection of the body, yet acknowledges the difficulty of describing the powers of a transformed body or the manner in which God will be seen. Several possibilities are examined without being treated as equally certain conclusions.

The question of vision draws together many themes of this reader. Throughout the collection, Augustine has distinguished bodily sensation from inward understanding and has asked how a created mind may know an uncreated reality. Here he considers the perfected relation between those powers. The saints will know God in a way that surpasses their present knowledge; the exact role of bodily sight receives a searching, qualified discussion.

The concluding chapter describes rest as fulfilled activity in love. Freedom has reached stability rather than disappeared, and personal identity remains within a community free from rivalry. Augustine also considers how the saints may remember the misery from which they have been delivered without suffering it again. Memory, knowledge, will, and love therefore reappear in his account of happiness.

The work closes in praise and expectation. The long argument about earthly and heavenly cities arrives at a vision of a common life whose good no longer passes away. That ending supplies this anthology with Augustine's own language of fulfillment while leaving readers able to reflect on the reasoning and commitments through which he approaches it.

Augustine

The Vision of God and the Rest of the Saints

The City of God · Book XXII, chapters 29–30

And now let us consider, with such ability as God may grant, how the saints shall be employed when they are clothed in immortal and spiritual bodies, and when the flesh shall live no longer in a fleshly but a spiritual fashion. And indeed, to tell the truth, I am at a loss to understand the nature of that employment, or, shall I rather say, repose and ease, for it has never come within the range of my bodily senses. And if I should speak of my mind or understanding, what is our understanding in comparison of its excellence? For then shall be that “peace of God which,” as the apostle says, “passes all

understanding,”—that is to say, all human, and perhaps all angelic understanding, but certainly not the divine. That it passes ours there is no doubt; but if it passes that of the angels,—and he who says “all understanding” seems to make no exception in their favor,—then we must understand him to mean that neither we nor the angels can understand, as God understands, the peace which God Himself enjoys.

Doubtless this passes all understanding but His own. But as we shall one day be made to participate, according to our slender capacity, in His peace, both in ourselves, and with our neighbor, and with God our chief good, in this respect the angels understand the peace of God in their own measure, and men too, though now far behind them, whatever spiritual advance they have made. For we must remember how great a man he was who said, “We know in part, and we prophesy in part, until that which is perfect is come;” and “Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face.” Such also is now the vision of the holy angels, who are also called our angels, because we, being rescued out of the power of darkness, and receiving the earnest of the Spirit, are translated into the kingdom of Christ, and already begin to belong to those angels with whom we shall enjoy that holy and most delightful city of God of which we have now written so much. Thus, then, the angels of God are our angels, as Christ is God’s and also ours.

They are God’s, because they have not abandoned Him; they are ours, because we are their fellow-citizens. The Lord Jesus also said, “See that you despise not one of these little ones: for I say to you, That in heaven their angels do always see the face of my Father which is in heaven.” As, then, they see, so shall we also see; but we do not yet see in this way. Therefore the apostle uses the words cited a little ago, “Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face.” This vision is reserved as the reward of our faith; and of it the Apostle John also says, “When He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” By “the face” of God we are to understand His manifestation, and not a part of the body similar to that which in our bodies we call by that name.

And so, when I am asked how the saints shall be employed in that spiritual body, I do not say what I see, but I say what I believe, according to that which I read in the psalm, “I believed, therefore I have spoken.” I say, then, they shall in the body see God; but whether they shall see Him by means of the body, as now we see the sun, moon, stars, sea, earth, and all that is in it, that is a difficult question. For it is hard to say that the saints shall then have such bodies that they shall not be able to shut and open their eyes as they please; while it is harder still to say that every one who shuts his eyes shall lose the vision of God. For if the prophet Elisha, though at a distance, saw his servant Gehazi, who thought that his wickedness would escape his master’s observation and accepted gifts from Naaman the Syrian, whom the prophet had cleansed from his foul

leprosy, how much more shall the saints in the spiritual body see all things, not only though their eyes be shut, but though they themselves be at a great distance?

For then shall be “that which is perfect,” of which the apostle says, “We know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.” Then, that he may illustrate as well as possible, by a simile, how superior the future life is to the life now lived, not only by ordinary men, but even by the foremost of the saints, he says, “When I was a child, I understood as a child, I spoke as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” If, then, even in this life, in which the prophetic power of remarkable men is no more worthy to be compared to the vision of the future life than childhood is to manhood, Elisha, though distant from his servant, saw him accepting gifts, shall we say that when that which is perfect is come, and the corruptible body no longer oppresses the soul, but is incorruptible and offers no impediment to it, the saints shall need bodily eyes to see, though Elisha had no need of them to see his servant?

For, following the Septuagint version, these are the prophet’s words: “Did not my heart go with you, when the man came out of his chariot to meet you, and you took his gifts?” Or, as the presbyter Jerome rendered it from the Hebrew, “Was not my heart present when the man turned from his chariot to meet you?” The prophet said that he saw this with his heart, miraculously aided by God, as no one can doubt. But how much more abundantly shall the saints enjoy this gift when God shall be all in all? Nevertheless the bodily eyes also shall have their office and their place, and shall be used by the spirit through the spiritual body. For the prophet did not forego the use of his eyes for seeing what was before them, though he did not need them to see his absent servant, and though he could have seen these present objects in spirit, and with his eyes shut, as he saw things far distant in a place where he himself was not. Far be it, then, from us to say that in the life to come the saints shall not see God when their eyes are shut, since they shall always see Him with the spirit.

But the question arises, whether, when their eyes are open, they shall see Him with the bodily eye? If the eyes of the spiritual body have no more power than the eyes which we now possess, manifestly God cannot be seen with them. They must be of a very different power if they can look upon that incorporeal nature which is not contained in any place, but is all in every place. For though we say that God is in heaven and on earth, as He, Himself says by the prophet, “I fill heaven and earth,” we do not mean that there is one part of God in heaven and another part on earth; but He is all in heaven and all on earth, not at alternate intervals of time, but both at once, as no bodily nature can be. The eye,

then, shall have a vastly superior power,—the power not of keen sight, such as is ascribed to serpents or eagles, for however keenly these animals see, they can discern nothing but bodily substances,—but the power of seeing things incorporeal.

Possibly it was this great power of vision which was temporarily communicated to the eyes of the holy Job while yet in this mortal body, when he says to God, “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye sees You: therefore I abhor myself, and melt away, and count myself dust and ashes;” although there is no reason why we should not understand this of the eye of the heart, of which the apostle says, “Having the eyes of your heart illuminated.” But that God shall be seen with these eyes no Christian doubts who believingly accepts what our God and Master says, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” But whether in the future life God shall also be seen with the bodily eye, this is now our question.

The expression of Scripture, “And all flesh shall see the salvation of God,” may without difficulty be understood as if it were said, “And every man shall see the Christ of God.” And He certainly was seen in the body, and shall be seen in the body when He judges quick and dead. And that Christ is the salvation of God, many other passages of Scripture witness, but especially the words of the venerable Simeon, who, when he had received into his hands the infant Christ, said, “Now You let Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word: for my eyes have seen Your salvation.” As for the words of the above-mentioned Job, as they are found in the Hebrew manuscripts, “And in my flesh I shall see God,” no doubt they were a prophecy of the resurrection of the flesh; yet he does not say “by the flesh.” And indeed, if he had said this, it would still be possible that Christ was meant by “God;” for Christ shall be seen by the flesh in the flesh. But even understanding it of God, it is only equivalent to saying, I shall be in the flesh when I see God.

Then the apostle’s expression, “face to face,” does not oblige us to believe that we shall see God by the bodily face in which are the eyes of the body, for we shall see Him without intermission in spirit. And if the apostle had not referred to the face of the inner man, he would not have said, “But we, with unveiled face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the spirit of the Lord.” In the same sense we understand what the Psalmist sings, “Draw near to Him, and be enlightened; and your faces shall not be ashamed.” For it is by faith we draw near to God, and faith is an act of the spirit, not of the body. But as we do not know what degree of perfection the spiritual body shall attain,—for here we speak of a matter of which we have no experience, and upon which the authority of Scripture does not definitely pronounce,—it is necessary that the words of the Book of Wisdom

be illustrated in us: “The thoughts of mortal men are timid, and our fore-castings uncertain.”

For if that reasoning of the philosophers, by which they attempt to make out that intelligible or mental objects are so seen by the mind, and sensible or bodily objects so seen by the body, that the former cannot be discerned by the mind through the body, nor the latter by the mind itself without the body,—if this reasoning were trustworthy, then it would certainly follow that God could not be seen by the eye even of a spiritual body. But this reasoning is exploded both by true reason and by prophetic authority. For who is so little acquainted with the truth as to say that God has no cognisance of sensible objects? Has He therefore a body, the eyes of which give Him this knowledge? Moreover, what we have just been relating of the prophet Elisha, does this not sufficiently show that bodily things can be discerned by the spirit without the help of the body? For when that servant received the gifts, certainly this was a bodily or material transaction, yet the prophet saw it not by the body, but by the spirit.

As, therefore, it is agreed that bodies are seen by the spirit, what if the power of the spiritual body shall be so great that spirit also is seen by the body? For God is a spirit. Besides, each man recognizes his own life—that life by which he now lives in the body, and which vivifies these earthly members and causes them to grow—by an interior sense, and not by his bodily eye; but the life of other men, though it is invisible, he sees with the bodily eye. For how do we distinguish between living and dead bodies, except by seeing at once both the body and the life which we cannot see save by the eye? But a life without a body we cannot see thus.

Therefore it may very well be, and it is thoroughly credible, that we shall in the future world see the material forms of the new heavens and the new earth in such a way that we shall most distinctly recognize God everywhere present and governing all things, material as well as spiritual, and shall see Him, not as now we understand the invisible things of God, by the things which are made, and see Him darkly, as in a mirror, and in part, and rather by faith than by bodily vision of material appearances, but by means of the bodies we shall wear and which we shall see wherever we turn our eyes. As we do not believe, but see that the living men around us who are exercising vital functions are alive, though we cannot see their life without their bodies, but see it most distinctly by means of their bodies, so, wherever we shall look with those spiritual eyes of our future bodies, we shall then, too, by means of bodily substances behold God, though a spirit, ruling all things.

Either, therefore, the eyes shall possess some quality similar to that of the mind, by which they may be able to discern spiritual things, and among these God,—a supposition for which it is difficult or even impossible to find any support in Scripture,—or, which is more easy to comprehend, God will be so

known by us, and shall be so much before us, that we shall see Him by the spirit in ourselves, in one another, in Himself, in the new heavens and the new earth, in every created thing which shall then exist; and also by the body we shall see Him in every body which the keen vision of the eye of the spiritual body shall reach. Our thoughts also shall be visible to all, for then shall be fulfilled the words of the apostle, “Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the thoughts of the heart, and then shall every one have praise of God.”

How great shall be that felicity, which shall be tainted with no evil, which shall lack no good, and which shall afford leisure for the praises of God, who shall be all in all! For I do not know what other employment there can be where no lassitude shall slacken activity, nor any want stimulate to labor. I am admonished also by the sacred song, in which I read or hear the words, “Blessed are they that dwell in Your house, O Lord; they will be still praising You.” All the members and organs of the incorruptible body, which now we see to be suited to various necessary uses, shall contribute to the praises of God; for in that life necessity shall have no place, but full, certain, secure, everlasting felicity. For all those parts of the bodily harmony, which are distributed through the whole body, within and without, and of which I have just been saying that they at present elude our observation, shall then be discerned; and, along with the other great and marvelous discoveries which shall then kindle rational minds in praise of the great Artificer, there shall be the enjoyment of a beauty which appeals to the reason.

What power of movement such bodies shall possess, I have not the audacity rashly to define, as I have not the ability to conceive. Nevertheless I will say that in any case, both in motion and at rest, they shall be, as in their appearance, seemly; for into that state nothing which is unseemly shall be admitted. One thing is certain, the body shall forthwith be wherever the spirit wills, and the spirit shall will nothing which is unbecoming either to the spirit or to the body. True honor shall be there, for it shall be denied to none who is worthy, nor yielded to any unworthy; neither shall any unworthy person so much as sue for it, for none but the worthy shall be there. True peace shall be there, where no one shall suffer opposition either from himself or any other. God Himself, who is the Author of virtue, shall there be its reward; for, as there is nothing greater or better, He has promised Himself. What else was meant by His word through the prophet, “I will be your God, and you shall be my people,” than, I shall be their satisfaction, I shall be all that men honorably desire,—life, and health, and nourishment, and plenty, and glory, and honor, and peace, and all good things?

This, too, is the right interpretation of the saying of the apostle, “That God may be all in all.” He shall be the end of our desires who shall be seen without

end, loved without cloy, praised without weariness. This outgoing of affection, this employment, shall certainly be, like eternal life itself, common to all.

But who can conceive, not to say describe, what degrees of honor and glory shall be awarded to the various degrees of merit? Yet it cannot be doubted that there shall be degrees. And in that blessed city there shall be this great blessing, that no inferior shall envy any superior, as now the archangels are not envied by the angels, because no one will wish to be what he has not received, though bound in strictest concord with him who has received; as in the body the finger does not seek to be the eye, though both members are harmoniously included in the complete structure of the body. And thus, along with his gift, greater or less, each shall receive this further gift of contentment to desire no more than he has.

Neither are we to suppose that because sin shall have no power to delight them, free will must be withdrawn. It will, on the contrary, be all the more truly free, because set free from delight in sinning to take unfailing delight in not sinning. For the first freedom of will which man received when he was created upright consisted in an ability not to sin, but also in an ability to sin; whereas this last freedom of will shall be superior, inasmuch as it shall not be able to sin. This, indeed, shall not be a natural ability, but the gift of God. For it is one thing to be God, another thing to be a partaker of God. God by nature cannot sin, but the partaker of God receives this inability from God. And in this divine gift there was to be observed this gradation, that man should first receive a free will by which he was able not to sin, and at last a free will by which he was not able to sin,—the former being adapted to the acquiring of merit, the latter to the enjoying of the reward.

But the nature thus constituted, having sinned when it had the ability to do so, it is by a more abundant grace that it is delivered so as to reach that freedom in which it cannot sin. For as the first immortality which Adam lost by sinning consisted in his being able not to die, while the last shall consist in his not being able to die; so the first free will consisted in his being able not to sin, the last in his not being able to sin. And thus piety and justice shall be as indefeasible as happiness. For certainly by sinning we lost both piety and happiness; but when we lost happiness, we did not lose the love of it. Are we to say that God Himself is not free because He cannot sin? In that city, then, there shall be free will, one in all the citizens, and indivisible in each, delivered from all ill, filled with all good, enjoying indefeasibly the delights of eternal joys, oblivious of sins, oblivious of sufferings, and yet not so oblivious of its deliverance as to be ungrateful to its Deliverer.

The soul, then, shall have an intellectual remembrance of its past ills; but, so far as regards sensible experience, they shall be quite forgotten. For a skillful physician knows, indeed, professionally almost all diseases; but experimentally he is ignorant of a great number which he himself has never suffered from. As,

therefore, there are two ways of knowing evil things,—one by mental insight, the other by sensible experience, for it is one thing to understand all vices by the wisdom of a cultivated mind, another to understand them by the foolishness of an abandoned life,—so also there are two ways of forgetting evils. For a well-instructed and learned man forgets them one way, and he who has experimentally suffered from them forgets them another,—the former by neglecting what he has learned, the latter by escaping what he has suffered. And in this latter way the saints shall forget their past ills, for they shall have so thoroughly escaped them all, that they shall be quite blotted out of their experience. But their intellectual knowledge, which shall be great, shall keep them acquainted not only with their own past woes, but with the eternal sufferings of the lost.

For if they were not to know that they had been miserable, how could they, as the Psalmist says, forever sing the mercies of God? Certainly that city shall have no greater joy than the celebration of the grace of Christ, who redeemed us by His blood. There shall be accomplished the words of the psalm, “Be still, and know that I am God.” There shall be the great Sabbath which has no evening, which God celebrated among His first works, as it is written, “And God rested on the seventh day from all His works which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it He had rested from all His work which God began to make.” For we shall ourselves be the seventh day, when we shall be filled and replenished with God’s blessing and sanctification. There shall we be still, and know that He is God; that He is that which we ourselves aspired to be when we fell away from Him, and listened to the voice of the seducer, “You shall be as gods,” and so abandoned God, who would have made us as gods, not by deserting Him, but by participating in Him.

For without Him what have we accomplished, save to perish in His anger? But when we are restored by Him, and perfected with greater grace, we shall have eternal leisure to see that He is God, for we shall be full of Him when He shall be all in all. For even our good works, when they are understood to be rather His than ours, are imputed to us that we may enjoy this Sabbath rest. For if we attribute them to ourselves, they shall be servile; for it is said of the Sabbath, “You shall do no servile work in it.” Therefore also it is said by Ezekiel the prophet, “And I gave them my Sabbaths to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctify them.” This knowledge shall be perfected when we shall be perfectly at rest, and shall perfectly know that He is God.

This Sabbath shall appear still more clearly if we count the ages as days, in accordance with the periods of time defined in Scripture, for that period will be found to be the seventh. The first age, as the first day, extends from Adam to the deluge; the second from the deluge to Abraham, equalling the first, not in length

of time, but in the number of generations, there being ten in each. From Abraham to the advent of Christ there are, as the evangelist Matthew calculates, three periods, in each of which are fourteen generations,—one period from Abraham to David, a second from David to the captivity, a third from the captivity to the birth of Christ in the flesh. There are thus five ages in all. The sixth is now passing, and cannot be measured by any number of generations, as it has been said, “It is not for you to know the times, which the Father has put in His own power.” After this period God shall rest as on the seventh day, when He shall give us (who shall be the seventh day) rest in Himself.

But there is not now space to treat of these ages; suffice it to say that the seventh shall be our Sabbath, which shall be brought to a close, not by an evening, but by the Lord’s day, as an eighth and eternal day, consecrated by the resurrection of Christ, and prefiguring the eternal repose not only of the spirit, but also of the body. There we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise. This is what shall be in the end without end. For what other end do we propose to ourselves than to attain to the kingdom of which there is no end?

I think I have now, by God’s help, discharged my obligation in writing this large work. Let those who think I have said too little, or those who think I have said too much, forgive me; and let those who think I have said just enough join me in giving thanks to God. Amen.

Reading Notes

1. This reading contains the complete final two chapters of The City of God. Augustine’s explicit qualifications concerning the future powers of bodily sight are preserved.

Afterword

The movement of this reader begins in a searching life and ends in an account of rest. Between those points Augustine repeatedly discovers that a familiar activity becomes difficult when examined. Remembering, speaking, choosing, loving, and measuring time ordinarily seem clear enough to be done without explanation. Reflection reveals how much each contains that the person performing it cannot readily state.

That discovery gives his inward inquiry its continuing force. The mind is present to itself, yet does not possess an exhaustive account of itself. It can remember what it no longer senses and anticipate what it has not experienced. It can know that an object is absent while making that object present to thought. It can recognize an error in its own judgment and still remain uncertain about the conditions under which that judgment arose. Augustine turns these experiences toward God, but he does not begin by treating ordinary experience as empty or unworthy of attention.

His account of the inner word is especially important to the arrangement of this collection. An outward expression can be heard, repeated, copied, or translated. What makes it an expression of understanding involves a relation to an inwardly held meaning. Augustine searches that relation for an image of the divine Word. He also repeatedly marks the distance between an image and the reality it is used to approach. Human understanding grows, forgets, hesitates, and corrects itself. The divine knowledge he seeks to describe has none of those defects.

Present readers may compare these distinctions with debates about language, intelligence, and artificial systems. Such comparisons are most useful when they identify a precise question. A sequence of signs can communicate a thought; whether a particular system understands what its signs convey requires a further account. Augustine's vocabulary supplies distinctions among sound, sign, knowledge, and inward word. Those distinctions can enrich a contemporary discussion while remaining rooted in the theological purpose of his own argument.

The analysis of time makes a related demand on precision. Augustine distinguishes an event from the memory of it, a future occurrence from the present expectation of it, and a body's movement from the duration by which that movement is measured. His reflections concern the experience and understanding of temporal succession. Their interest does not depend on turning them into an anticipation of a particular physical theory. They show how a question that looks external can return the inquirer to attention, memory, and expectation.

The inward inquiry does not leave moral action behind. In the conversion narrative, Augustine's difficulty is not exhausted by uncertainty about a proposition. He has become persuaded of things that he continues to resist in practice. His later writings on grace examine that resistance within a theological account of the will. The reader encounters both his defense of responsibility and his insistence that the good will itself needs a gift. The relation between those claims must be considered through the argument, rather than decided by assigning him a convenient modern label.

The homilies on First John bring this concern for lived belief into the foreground. Religious speech can be correct while conduct contradicts what the speaker professes. Augustine makes the possibility uncomfortable by locating it within the community that hears him. His warning about antichrists therefore includes a demand for examination of one's own life. It is a demand that resists the ease with which a religious label can become a verdict applied only to others.

The letters on religious authority complicate that demand. Augustine could understand coercion as an instrument of correction and could appeal to accounts of people who later approved the pressure placed on them. He could also oppose execution, bodily retaliation, and the hatred of an enemy. These commitments belong to the same correspondent. Setting them side by side permits a serious question about how a claim to seek another person's good can authorize restraints on that person's conscience.

His opponents' experience is not fully recoverable from his account of them. A reader should therefore distinguish the event described, the interpretation he places on it, and the conclusion he draws for policy. This is a general discipline of reading public controversy. It applies even when the writer is persuasive, learned, and sincere. It also permits the strength of an argument to be assessed without making agreement with the whole of a person's thought a condition of hearing any part of it.

The account of peace carries the discussion beyond a simple opposition between harmony and conflict. Augustine notices that even violent people seek an arrangement in which their own purposes can proceed without resistance. Agreement alone does not settle the justice of what is agreed. Peace has to be considered through the goods it serves, the relationships it orders, and the lives it permits people to lead. His two cities are distinguished by their loves, a distinction that reaches beneath the names of visible institutions.

The final account of resurrection returns to the person whose inward life has occupied so much of the volume. Augustine's hope includes embodied existence. At the same time, he acknowledges limits in describing the powers and experiences of a transformed body. The conclusion combines an affirmation of

fulfillment with questions about how that fulfillment can be imagined by those who have not experienced it.

This reader leaves those questions in the company of the arguments that generated them. The selection is small in relation to Augustine's surviving writings, but its passages are long enough to make more than a collection of memorable phrases. They offer an encounter with a thinker whose confidence, uncertainty, longing, and exercise of authority remain open to careful examination. Following the argument may lead to recognition, correction, disagreement, or a clearer statement of the question one wishes to ask.

Editorial Method and Modernization

The source base consists of the historical translations in the first series of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Digital transcriptions were used to locate and assemble the passages; the historical volume, translator, and original book, chapter, or section remain the bibliographic reference. Modern website introductions, advertisements, interface text, and contemporary editorial additions are not part of Augustine's readings.

Source annotations embedded in the digital text were separated from the main prose. This includes footnote reference numbers, original printed page markers, and cross-reference apparatus. Original numbered sections of Augustine's text were retained. Biblical references available in the source annotations were used to construct the finding index. Omitting a nineteenth-century footnote does not imply that its claim or attribution has been independently settled in this edition.

The modernization changes thee, thou, thy, and related forms to contemporary equivalents, adjusts their associated verbs, and uses American spellings. Expressions such as the Holy Ghost and charity are ordinarily rendered the Holy Spirit and love where those are their meanings in context. Technical terms with a continuing theological use are retained and explained in the glossary. The source's name Augustin is presented as Augustine in the reading text.

Some long source paragraphs have been divided at sentence boundaries for readability. Such divisions do not change the order of the text. A paragraph's original location remains the source line or section number that governs it. Whole source chapters or numbered sections are used within the stated ranges; separated ranges are introduced as separate readings. The result is a selection and modernization, not an unabridged edition of any of the large collected works.

A small number of evident transcription or grammatical errors were repaired. Editorial words supplied to clarify a source construction appear in square brackets and are discussed in the chapter notes. In Confessions XI.31, the clarification in this way identifies the kind of temporal knowing that Augustine denies of God; it prevents the comparison with a remembered song from sounding like a denial of divine knowledge.

The historical readings preserve arguments about religious opponents, punishment, household hierarchy, and political authority. Editorial introductions identify the setting and the speaker's position. Terms in those arguments are not silently rewritten to create agreement with a contemporary position. The

selection also preserves qualifications, objections, and distinctions necessary to follow the chosen argument.

The editorial work was prepared through sustained human-AI collaboration with OpenAI ChatGPT. The source register provides a route for checking the readings independently. Modernization makes judgments about language; readers conducting detailed theological or philological research should compare the identified historical translation and, where appropriate, a suitable Latin edition.

Glossary

Antichrist. An opponent of Christ. In the selected First John homily, Augustine applies the term to doctrinal denial, division from the Church, and conduct that contradicts a profession of Christ.

Catholic. Universal. In Augustine's usage the term also identifies the Church communion he defends against rival Christian communities; it should be read in its late antique setting.

Charity. The older translations' usual word for caritas, commonly rendered love in this reader. It denotes an ordering of desire toward God and the good of the neighbor.

Concupiscence. Desire or appetite, especially desire understood as disordered. Its exact scope depends on the passage; it need not refer only to sexual desire.

Confession. An acknowledgment of wrongdoing, an acknowledgment of faith, or praise of God. These senses can operate together in the Confessions.

Continence. The restraint and ordering of desire. In the conversion narrative it is personified as a life made possible through trust in God.

Creature. Anything created. The term includes human beings, angels, and the visible world, rather than referring only to animals.

Desert. What is deserved or merited. In arguments about grace, the question concerns whether a good action or reward has been earned and what made the action possible.

Distentio. A stretching or extension. In Confessions XI Augustine uses the term in discussing the soul's relation to remembrance, attention, and expectation.

Donatists. Members of the North African Christian movement opposed by Augustine in the letters selected here. The controversy concerned the Church, sacraments, holiness, succession, and authority.

Enjoyment. In On Christian Doctrine, resting in something loved for its own sake. Augustine distinguishes this from use, which relates something to the end toward which love should move.

Faith. Belief and trust directed toward God. Augustine relates faith to love, understanding, and the conduct of life; the term's function varies across the selected works.

Flesh. A biblical and theological term that may refer to the body, embodied human life, or a disordered orientation of desire. Context is necessary to distinguish these senses.

Grace. God's freely given favor and assistance. The later selections emphasize its role in enabling belief, willing, perseverance, and good action.

Image. A likeness that permits some understanding while preserving a difference from what it resembles. Augustine's analogies of mind and word depend on both likeness and unlikeness.

Incarnation. The Word's becoming human in Jesus Christ. Augustine distinguishes the eternal divine Word from the temporal events of the human life assumed by the Word.

Inner Word. Understanding considered inwardly before, or apart from, its expression in an outward sound or particular spoken language. It is central to the selected analogy in On the Trinity XV.

Logos. The Greek term commonly translated Word, with meanings also associated with reason or account. In John 1 and Augustine's exposition it names the divine Word.

Manichaeans. Followers of Mani, whose teaching Augustine once accepted and later opposed. Their account of good and evil formed an important background to his intellectual development.

Memory. The inward capacity examined in Confessions X. It includes remembered perceptions, knowledge, emotions, and the person's awareness of a past that is no longer directly sensed.

Merit. An action or quality considered in relation to what is deserved. Augustine's grace writings ask how rewarded good actions are themselves made possible by divine gifts.

Nature. What something is, together with the goods and capacities belonging to it. Augustine's account of evil distinguishes the goodness of a nature from its corruption.

Person. A term used in Trinitarian discussion to distinguish Father, Son, and Holy Spirit without describing them as three separate gods. The analogy with a human person is limited.

Predestination. God's prior determination of the saving gifts discussed in Augustine's later writings. The selections present his argument about the beginning of faith and its relation to grace.

Presbyter. An ordained minister or elder. Augustine held this office at Hippo before becoming a bishop.

Privation. A lack or loss of a good that belongs to a nature. It is used to explain evil without treating evil as an independent substance.

Retractations. Augustine's review of his earlier writings, also called Revisions. The title denotes reconsideration and correction, rather than withdrawal of everything previously written.

Sacrament. A sacred sign and ecclesial action. In the selected controversies, questions about sacraments concern both their administration and the unity of the Church.

Substance. What exists in itself or what something is. The term has a philosophical and theological range that is broader than the modern everyday sense of physical material.

Tractate. A treatment or exposition, often a sermon. Augustine's tractates on John follow the Gospel through successive occasions of preaching.

Trinity. The Christian confession of one God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Augustine explores relations and analogies while insisting on divine unity.

Two Cities. Communities distinguished by their governing loves in The City of God. They cannot be identified simply with two modern states or with a single pair of visible institutions.

Unction. Anointing. The selected First John homilies connect it with the Holy Spirit's inward teaching.

Use. In On Christian Doctrine, relating something to the end in which happiness is sought. It is part of an account of ordered love, rather than a general endorsement of exploiting people.

Word. Depending on context, an outward spoken sign, inward understanding, scriptural speech, or the divine Word. Augustine's arguments often turn on distinguishing these uses.

Source Register

All selected readings derive from the first series of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, edited by Philip Schaff and published by the Christian Literature Publishing Company at Buffalo in 1886-1888. The following register gives the translator and volume, followed by the exact ranges used in this reader. The chapter numbers on the left refer to this reader. Digital source transcriptions are identified at the end of this register.

Confessions

Translation: J. G. Pilkington. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, volume 1, edited by Philip Schaff, Buffalo, Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1886.

Chapter 1: Book VII, chapters I–II.

Chapter 1: Book VII, chapters IX–XXI.

Chapter 2: Book VIII, chapters V–X.

Chapter 3: Book VIII, chapters XI–XII.

Chapter 3: Book IX, chapters I–III.

Chapter 3: Book IX, chapters V–VI.

Chapter 7: Book X, chapters VI–XIX.

Chapter 8: Book X, chapters I–V.

Chapter 8: Book X, chapters XX–XXIX.

Chapter 10: Book XI, chapters 1–13.

Chapter 10: Book XII, chapters 1–9.

Chapter 11: Book XI, chapters 14–22.

Chapter 12: Book XI, chapters 23–31.

Tractates on the Gospel of John

Translation: John Gibb and James Innes. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, volume 7; Philip Schaff, editor; Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888.

Chapter 4: Tractate 1, complete.

Chapter 5: Tractate 2, complete.

Chapter 5: Tractate 3, sections 1–7.

Chapter 5: Tractate 3, sections 15–18.

On the Trinity

Translation: Arthur West Haddan; historical revision by William G. T. Shedd. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, volume 3; Philip Schaff, editor; Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887.

Chapter 6: Book XV, chapters 10–16, sections 17–26.

Chapter 9: Book IX, chapters I–IV.

Chapter 9: Book X, chapters X–XII.

Enchiridion

Translation: J. F. Shaw. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, volume 3, edited by Philip Schaff, Buffalo, Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887

Chapter 13: Chapters 9–23.

On Grace and Free Will

Translation: Peter Holmes and Robert Ernest Wallis; revised by Benjamin B. Warfield. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, volume 5, edited by Philip Schaff, Buffalo, Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887

Chapter 14: Chapters 1–11.

Chapter 15: Chapters 12–21.

On the Predestination of the Saints

Translation: Peter Holmes and Robert Ernest Wallis; revised by Benjamin B. Warfield. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, volume 5, edited by Philip Schaff, Buffalo, Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887

Chapter 15: Chapters 5–8.

Homilies on the First Epistle of John

Translation: H. Browne; historical revision by Joseph H. Myers. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, volume 7, edited by Philip Schaff (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888)

Chapter 16: Homily VII, complete, including its opening Scripture reading (1 John 4:4-12).

Chapter 17: Homily III, complete, including its opening Scripture reading (1 John 2:18-27).

On Christian Doctrine

Translation: J. F. Shaw. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, volume 2, edited by Philip Schaff (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887)

Chapter 18: Book I, chapters 22-34, complete.

Chapter 18: Book I, chapters 35-40, complete.

Letter 43

Translation: J. G. Cunningham. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, volume 1, edited by Philip Schaff. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886.

Chapter 19: sections 1–2.

Letter 93

Translation: J. G. Cunningham. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, volume 1, edited by Philip Schaff. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886.

Chapter 19: sections 28–34.

Chapter 20: sections 1–19.

Letter 133

Translation: J. G. Cunningham. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, volume 1, edited by Philip Schaff. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886.

Chapter 21: sections 1–3 and conclusion.

Letter 189

Translation: J. G. Cunningham. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, volume 1, edited by Philip Schaff. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886.

Chapter 21: sections 1–8 and conclusion.

The City of God

Translation: Marcus Dods. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, volume 2, edited by Philip Schaff, Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1887

Chapter 22: Book XIV, chapter 28.

Chapter 22: Book XIX, chapters 24–25.

Chapter 23: Book XIX, chapters 12–17.

Chapter 24: Book XXII, chapters 29–30.

Digital Source Volumes

NPNF, First Series, volume 1: https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf101.all.html

NPNF, First Series, volume 2: https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf102.all.html

NPNF, First Series, volume 3: https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf103.all.html

NPNF, First Series, volume 5: https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf105.all.html

NPNF, First Series, volume 7: https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf107.all.html

Historical book, chapter, tractate, homily, letter, and section numbers are the stable identifiers. URLs describe the transcription consulted; Augustine’s work and the named historical translation are the source texts.

Biblical Passage Index

References identified in the selected source sections are keyed to the numbered chapters of this reader. The index includes source cross-references and is a finding aid; it does not enumerate every possible biblical echo. Psalm numbers follow the references supplied by the source editions. The abbreviation ch. identifies a chapter of this reader.

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About the Editor

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Since the early days of modern conversational AI, Youvan has collaborated extensively with ChatGPT, making sustained human-AI dialogue a method of inquiry and authorship. After ResearchGate deplatformed his collection of approximately 6,000 AI-assisted preprints in July 2026, he turned to Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing.

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