

The Confessions (Book IV)

Augustine of Hippo

Patristic · Nicene & Post-Nicene · Confession

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INTRODUCTION

A friend dies. Augustine is devastated in a way he cannot yet explain — he has loved a creature as though it were a god. The grief is real and the analysis is searching: he meditates on what it means to love mortal things, whether consolation is possible, and why beauty moves us the way it does. Some of the Confessions' finest prose is here, and some of its most honest self-examination. Augustine is in his twenties; the theology is forming under pressure.

Then follows a period of nine years from the nineteenth year of his age, during which having lost a friend, he followed the Manichæans — and wrote books on the fair and fit, and published a work on the liberal arts, and the categories of Aristotle.

Chapter 1. Concerning that Most Unhappy Time in Which He, Being Deceived, Deceived Others; And Concerning the Mockers of His Confession.

During this space of nine years, then, from my nineteenth to my eight and twentieth year, we went on seduced and seducing, deceived and deceiving, in various lusts; publicly, by sciences which they style liberal— secretly, with a falsity called religion. Here proud, there superstitious, everywhere vain! Here, striving after the emptiness of popular fame, even to theatrical applauses, and poetic contests, and strifes for grassy garlands, and the follies of shows and the intemperance of desire. There, seeking to be purged from these our corruptions by carrying food to those who were called elect and holy, out of which, in the laboratory of their stomachs, they should make for us angels and gods, by whom we might be delivered. These things did I follow eagerly, and practise with my friends — by me and with me deceived. Let the arrogant, and such as have not been yet savingly cast down and stricken by You, O my God, laugh at me; but notwithstanding I would confess to You my own shame in Your praise. Bear with me, I beseech You, and give me grace to retrace in my present remembrance the circlings of my past errors, and to offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving. For what am I to myself without You, but a guide to my own downfall? Or what am I even at the best, but one sucking Your milk, 1 Peter 2:2 and feeding upon You, the meat that perishes not? John 6:27 But what kind of man is any man, seeing that he is but a man? Let, then, the strong and the mighty laugh at us, but let us who are poor and needy confess unto You.

Chapter 2. He Teaches Rhetoric, the Only Thing He Loved, and Scorns the Soothsayer, Who Promised Him Victory.

In those years I taught the art of rhetoric, and, overcome by cupidity, put to sale a loquacity by which to overcome. Yet I preferred — Lord, You know— to have honest scholars (as they are esteemed); and these I, without artifice, taught artifices, not to be put in practise against the life of the guiltless, though sometimes for the life of the guilty. And You, O God, from afar saw me stumbling in that slippery path, and amid much smoke sending out some flashes of fidelity, which I exhibited in that my guidance of such as loved vanity and sought after leasing, I being their companion. In those years I had one (whom I knew not in what is called lawful wedlock, but whom my wayward passion, void of understanding, had discovered), yet one only, remaining faithful even to her; in whom I found out truly by my own experience what difference there is between the restraints of the marriage bonds, contracted for the sake of issue, and the compact of a lustful love, where children are born against the parents will, although, being born, they compel love.

I remember, too, that when I decided to compete for a theatrical prize, a soothsayer demanded of me what I would give him to win; but I, detesting and abominating such foul mysteries, answered, That if the garland were of imperishable gold, I would not suffer a fly to be destroyed to secure it for me. For he was to slay certain living creatures in his sacrifices, and by those honours to invite the devils to give me their support. But this ill thing I also refused, not out of a pure love for You, O God of my heart; for I knew not how to love You, knowing not how to conceive anything beyond corporeal brightness. And does not a soul, sighing after such-like fictions, commit fornication against You, trust in false things, and nourish the wind? Hosea 12:1 But I would not, forsooth, have sacrifices offered to devils on my behalf, though I myself was offering sacrifices to them by that superstition. For what else is nourishing the wind but nourishing them, that is, by our wanderings to become their enjoyment and derision?

Chapter 3. Not Even the Most Experienced Men Could Persuade Him of the Vanity of Astrology to Which He Was Devoted.

Those impostors, then, whom they designate Mathematicians, I consulted without hesitation, because they used no sacrifices, and invoked the aid of no spirit for their divinations, which art Christian and true piety fitly rejects and condemns. For good it is to confess unto You, and to say, Be merciful unto me, heal my soul, for I have sinned against You; and not to abuse Your goodness for a license to sin, but to remember the words of the Lord, Behold, you are made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto you. John 5:14 All of which salutary advice they endeavour to destroy when they say, The cause of your sin is inevitably determined in heaven; and, This did Venus, or Saturn, or Mars; in order that man, forsooth, flesh and blood, and proud corruption, may be blameless, while the Creator and Ordainer of heaven and stars is to bear the blame. And who is this but You, our God, the sweetness and well-spring of righteousness, who renderest to every man according to his deeds, and despisest not a broken and a contrite heart!

There was in those days a wise man, very skilful in medicine, and much renowned therein, who had with his own proconsular hand put the Agonistic garland upon my distempered head, not, though, as a physician; for this disease You alone heal, who resistest the proud, and givest grace to the humble. But did You fail me even by that old man, or forbear from healing my soul? For when I had become more familiar with him, and hung assiduously and fixedly on his conversation (for though couched in simple language, it was replete with vivacity, life, and earnestness), when he had perceived from my discourse that I was given to books of the horoscope-casters, he, in a kind and fatherly manner, advised me to throw them away, and not vainly bestow the care and labour necessary for useful things upon these vanities; saying that he himself in his earlier years had studied that art with a view to gaining his living by following it as a profession, and that, as he had understood Hippocrates, he would soon have understood this, and yet he had given it up, and followed medicine, for no other reason than that he discovered it to be utterly false, and he, being a man of character, would not gain his living by beguiling people. But you, says he, who hast rhetoric to support yourself by, so that you follow this of free will, not of necessity — all the more, then, ought you to give me credit herein, who laboured to attain it so perfectly, as I wished to gain my living by it alone. When I asked him to account for so many true things being foretold by it, he answered me (as he could) that the force of chance, diffused throughout the whole order of nature, brought this about. For if when a man by accident opens the leaves of some poet, who sang and intended something far different, a verse oftentimes fell out wondrously apposite to the present business, it were not to be wondered at, he continued, if out of the soul of man, by some higher instinct, not knowing what goes on within itself, an answer should be given by chance, not art, which should coincide with the business and actions of the questioner.

And thus truly, either by or through him, You looked after me. And You delineated in my memory what I might afterwards search out for myself. But at that time neither he, nor my most dear Nebridius, a youth most good and most circumspect, who scoffed at that whole stock of divination, could persuade me to forsake it, the authority of the authors influencing me still more; and as yet I had lighted upon no certain proof— such as I sought — whereby it might without doubt appear that what had been truly foretold by those consulted was by accident or chance, not by the art of the star-gazers.

Chapter 4. Sorely Distressed by Weeping at the Death of His Friend, He Provides Consolation for Himself.

In those years, when I first began to teach rhetoric in my native town, I had acquired a very dear friend, from association in our studies, of my own age, and, like myself, just rising up into the flower of youth. He had grown up with me from childhood, and we had been both classmates and playmates. But he was not then my friend, nor, indeed, afterwards, as true friendship is; for true it is not but in such as You bind together, cleaving unto You by that love which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us. Romans 5:5 But yet it was too sweet, being ripened by the fervour of similar studies. For, from the true faith (which he, as a youth, had not soundly and thoroughly become master of), I had turned him aside towards those superstitious and pernicious fables which my mother mourned in me. With me this man's mind now erred, nor could my soul exist without him. But behold, You were close behind Your fugitives — at once God of vengeance and Fountain of mercies, who turnest us to

Yourself by wondrous means. You removed that man from this life when he had scarce completed one whole year of my friendship, sweet to me above all the sweetness of that my life.

Who can show forth all Your praise which he has experienced in himself alone? What was it that Thou did then, O my God, and how unsearchable are the depths of Your judgments! For when, sore sick of a fever, he long lay unconscious in a death-sweat, and all despaired of his recovery, he was baptized without his knowledge; myself meanwhile little caring, presuming that his soul would retain rather what it had imbibed from me, than what was done to his unconscious body. Far different, however, was it, for he was revived and restored. Straightway, as soon as I could talk to him (which I could as soon as he was able, for I never left him, and we hung too much upon each other), I attempted to jest with him, as if he also would jest with me at that baptism which he had received when mind and senses were in abeyance, but had now learned that he had received. But he shuddered at me, as if I were his enemy; and, with a remarkable and unexpected freedom, admonished me, if I desired to continue his friend, to desist from speaking to him in such a way. I, confounded and confused, concealed all my emotions, till he should get well, and his health be strong enough to allow me to deal with him as I wished. But he was withdrawn from my frenzy, that with You he might be preserved for my comfort. A few days after, during my absence, he had a return of the fever, and died.

At this sorrow my heart was utterly darkened, and whatever I looked upon was death. My native country was a torture to me, and my father's house a wondrous unhappiness; and whatsoever I had participated in with him, wanting him, turned into a frightful torture. My eyes sought him everywhere, but he was not granted them; and I hated all places because he was not in them; nor could they now say to me, Behold; he is coming, as they did when he was alive and absent. I became a great puzzle to myself, and asked my soul why she was so sad, and why she so exceedingly disquieted me; but she knew not what to answer me. And if I said, Hope in God, she very properly obeyed me not; because that most dear friend whom she had lost was, being man, both truer and better than that phantasm she was bid to hope in. Naught but tears were sweet to me, and they succeeded my friend in the dearest of my affections.

Chapter 5. Why Weeping is Pleasant to the Wretched.

And now, O Lord, these things are passed away, and time has healed my wound. May I learn from You, who art Truth, and apply the ear of my heart unto Your mouth, that You may tell me why weeping should be so sweet to the unhappy. Have You — although present everywhere — cast away far from You our misery? And You abide in Yourself, but we are disquieted with various trials; and yet, unless we wept in Your ears, there would be no hope for us remaining. Whence, then, is it that such sweet fruit is plucked from the bitterness of life, from groans, tears, sighs, and lamentations? Is it the hope that You hear us that sweetens it? This is true of prayer, for therein is a desire to approach unto You. But is it also in grief for a thing lost, and the sorrow with which I was then overwhelmed? For I had neither hope of his coming to life again, nor did I seek this with my tears; but I grieved and wept only, for I was miserable, and had lost my joy. Or is weeping a bitter thing, and for distaste of the things which aforetime we enjoyed before, and even then, when we are loathing them, does it cause us pleasure?

Chapter 6. His Friend Being Snatched Away by Death, He Imagines that He Remains Only as Half.

But why do I speak of these things? For this is not the time to question, but rather to confess unto You. Miserable I was, and miserable is every soul fettered by the friendship of perishable things — he is torn to pieces when he loses them, and then is sensible of the misery which he had before ever he lost them. Thus was it at that time with me; I wept most bitterly, and found rest in bitterness. Thus was I miserable, and that life of misery I accounted dearer than my friend. For though I would willingly have changed it, yet I was even more unwilling to lose it than him; yea, I knew not whether I was willing to lose it even for him, as is handed down to us (if not an invention) of Pylades and Orestes, that they would gladly have died one for another, or both together, it being worse than death to them not to live together. But there had sprung up in me some kind of feeling, too, contrary to this, for both exceedingly wearisome was it to me to live, and dreadful to die, I suppose, the more I loved him, so much the more did I hate and fear, as a most cruel enemy, that death which had robbed me of him; and I imagined it would suddenly annihilate all men, as it had power over him. Thus, I remember, it was with me. Behold my heart, O my God! Behold and look into me, for I remember it well, O my Hope! Who cleansest me from the uncleanness of such affections, directing my eyes towards You, and plucking my feet out of the net. For I was astonished that other mortals lived, since he whom I loved, as if he would never

die, was dead; and I wondered still more that I, who was to him a second self, could live when he was dead. Well did one say of his friend, Thou half of my soul, for I felt that my soul and his soul were but one soul in two bodies; and, consequently, my life was a horror to me, because I would not live in half. And therefore, perchance, was I afraid to die, lest he should die wholly whom I had so greatly loved.

Chapter 7. Troubled by Restlessness and Grief, He Leaves His Country a Second Time for Carthage.

O madness, which know not how to love men as men should be loved! O foolish man that I then was, enduring with so much impatience the lot of man! So I fretted, sighed, wept, tormented myself, and took neither rest nor advice. For I bore about with me a rent and polluted soul, impatient of being borne by me, and where to repose it I found not. Not in pleasant groves, not in sport or song, not in fragrant spots, nor in magnificent banquetings, nor in the pleasures of the bed and the couch, nor, finally, in books and songs did it find repose. All things looked terrible, even the very light itself; and whatsoever was not what he was, was repulsive and hateful, except groans and tears, for in those alone found I a little repose. But when my soul was withdrawn from them, a heavy burden of misery weighed me down. To You, O Lord, should it have been raised, for You to lighten and avert it. This I knew, but was neither willing nor able; all the more since, in my thoughts of You, You were not any solid or substantial thing to me. For You were not Yourself, but an empty phantasm, and my error was my god. If I attempted to discharge my burden thereon, that it might find rest, it sank into emptiness, and came rushing down again upon me, and I remained to myself an unhappy spot, where I could neither stay nor depart from. For whither could my heart fly from my heart? Whither could I fly from my own self? Whither not follow myself? And yet fled I from my country; for so should my eyes look less for him where they were not accustomed to see him. And thus I left the town of Thagaste, and came to Carthage.

Chapter 8. That His Grief Ceased by Time, and the Consolation of Friends.

Times lose no time, nor do they idly roll through our senses. They work strange operations on the mind. Behold, they came and went from day to day, and by coming and going they disseminated in my mind other ideas and other remembrances, and little by little patched me up again with the former kind of delights, unto which that sorrow of mine yielded. But yet there succeeded, not certainly other sorrows, yet the causes of other sorrows. For whence had that former sorrow so easily penetrated to the quick, but that I had poured out my soul upon the dust, in loving one who must die as if he were never to die? But what revived and refreshed me especially was the consolations of other friends, with whom I did love what instead of You I loved. And this was a monstrous fable and protracted lie, by whose adulterous contact our soul, which lay itching in our ears, was being polluted. But that fable would not die to me so oft as any of my friends died. There were other things in them which did more lay hold of my mind — to discourse and jest with them; to indulge in an interchange of kindnesses; to read together pleasant books; together to trifle, and together to be earnest; to differ at times without ill-humour, as a man would do with his own self; and even by the infrequency of these differences to give zest to our more frequent consentings; sometimes teaching, sometimes being taught; longing for the absent with impatience, and welcoming the coming with joy. These and similar expressions, emanating from the

hearts of those who loved and were beloved in return, by the countenance, the tongue, the eyes, and a thousand pleasing movements, were so much fuel to melt our souls together, and out of many to make but one.

Chapter 9. That the Love of a Human Being, However Constant in Loving and Returning Love, Perishes; While He Who Loves God Never Loses a Friend.

This is it that is loved in friends; and so loved that a man's conscience accuses itself if he love not him by whom he is beloved, or love not again him that loves him, expecting nothing from him but indications of his love. Hence that mourning if one die, and gloom of sorrow, that steeping of the heart in tears, all sweetness turned into bitterness, and upon the loss of the life of the dying, the death of the living. Blessed be he who loves You, and his friend in You, and his enemy for Your sake. For he alone loses none dear to him to whom all are dear in Him who cannot be lost. And who is this but our God, the God that created heaven and earth, Genesis 1:1 and fills them, Jeremiah 23:24 because by filling them He created them? None loses You but he who leaves You. And he who leaves You, whither goes he, or whither flees he, but from You well pleased to You angry? For where does not he find Your law in his own punishment? And Your law is the truth, and truth Thou. John 14:6

Chapter 10. That All Things Exist that They May Perish, and that We are Not Safe Unless God Watches Over Us.

Turn us again, O Lord God of Hosts, cause Your face to shine; and we shall be saved. For wherever the soul of man turns itself, unless towards You, it is affixed to sorrows, yea, though it is affixed to beauteous things without You and without itself. And yet they were not unless they were from You. They rise and set; and by rising, they begin as it were to be; and they grow, that they may become perfect; and when perfect, they wax old and perish; and all wax not old, but all perish. Therefore when they rise and tend to be, the more rapidly they grow that they may be, so much the more they hasten not to be. This is the way of them. Thus much have You given them, because they are parts of things, which exist not all at the same time, but by departing and succeeding they together make up the universe, of which they are parts. And even thus is our speech accomplished by signs emitting a sound; but this, again, is not perfected unless one word pass away when it has sounded its part, in order that another may succeed it. Let my soul praise You out of all these things, O God, the Creator of all; but let not my soul be affixed to these things by the glue of love, through the senses of the body. For they go whither they were to go, that they might no longer be; and they rend her with pestilent desires, because she longs to be, and yet loves to rest in what she loves. But in these things no place is to be found; they stay not — they flee; and who is he that is able to follow them with the senses of the flesh? Or who can grasp them, even when they are near? For tardy is the sense of the flesh, because it is the sense of the flesh, and its boundary is itself. It suffices for that for which it was made, but it is not sufficient to stay things running their course from their appointed starting-place to the end appointed. For in Your word, by which they were created, they hear the fiat, Hence and hitherto.

Chapter 11. That Portions of the World are Not to Be Loved; But that God, Their Author, is Immutable, and His Word Eternal.

Be not foolish, O my soul, and deaden not the ear of your heart with the tumult of your folly. Harken also. The word itself invokes you to return; and there is the place of rest imperturbable, where love is not abandoned if itself abandons not. Behold, these things pass away, that others may succeed them, and so this lower universe be made complete in all its parts. But do I depart anywhere, says the word of God? There fix your habitation. There commit whatsoever you have thence, O my soul; at all events now you are tired out with deceits. Commit to truth whatsoever you have from the truth, and nothing shall you lose; and your decay shall flourish again, and all your diseases be healed, and your perishable parts shall be reformed and renovated, and drawn together to you; nor shall they put you down where themselves descend, but they shall abide with you, and continue for ever before God, who abides and continues forever. 1 Peter 1:23

Why, then, be perverse and follow your flesh? Rather let it be converted and follow you. Whatever by her you feel, is but in part; and the whole, of which these are portions, you are ignorant of, and yet they delight you. But had the sense of your flesh been capable of comprehending the whole, and not itself also, for your punishment, been justly limited to a portion of the whole, you would that whatsoever exists at the present time should pass away, that so the whole might please you more. For what we speak, also by the same sense of the flesh you hear, and yet wouldest not thou that the syllables should stay, but fly away, that others may come, and the whole be heard. Thus it is always, when any single thing is composed of many, all of which exist not together, all together would delight more than they do simply could all be perceived at once. But far better than these is He who made all; and He is our God, and He passes not away, for there is nothing to succeed Him. If bodies please you, praise God for them, and turn back your love upon their Creator, lest in those things which please you you displease.

Chapter 12. Love is Not Condemned, But Love in God, in Whom There is Rest Through Jesus Christ, is to Be Preferred.

If souls please you, let them be loved in God; for they also are mutable, but in Him are they firmly established, else would they pass, and pass away. In Him, then, let them be beloved; and draw unto Him along with you as many souls as you can and say to them, Him let us love, Him let us love; He created these, nor is He far off. For He did not create them, and then depart; but they are of Him, and in Him. Behold, there is He wherever truth is known. He is within the very heart, but yet has the heart wandered from Him. Return to your heart, O you transgressors, Isaiah 56:8 and cleave fast unto Him that made you. Stand with Him, and you shall stand fast. Rest in Him, and you shall be at rest. Where do you go in rugged paths? Where do you go? The good that you love is from Him; and as it has respect unto Him it is both good and pleasant, and justly shall it be embittered, because whatsoever comes from Him is unjustly loved if He be forsaken for it. Why, then, will you wander farther and farther in these difficult and toilsome ways? There is no rest where you seek it. Seek what you seek; but it is not there where you seek. You seek a blessed life in the land of death; it is not there. For could a blessed life be where life itself is not?

But our very Life descended hither, and bore our death, and slew it, out of the abundance of His own life; and thundering He called loudly to us to return hence to Him into that secret place whence He came forth to us — first into the Virgin's womb, where the human creature was married to Him — our mortal flesh, that it might not be for ever mortal — and thence as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, rejoicing as a strong man to run a race. For He tarried not, but ran crying out by words, deeds, death, life, descent, ascension, crying aloud to us to return to Him. And He departed from our sight, that we might return to our heart, and there find Him. For He departed, and behold, He is here. He would not be long with us, yet left us not; for He departed there, whence He never departed, because the world was made by Him. John 1:10 And in this world He was, and into this world He came to save sinners, 1 Timothy 1:15 unto whom my soul does confess, that He may heal it, for it has sinned against Him. O you sons of men, how long so slow of heart? Luke 24:25 Even now, after the Life is descended to you, will you not ascend and live? But where do you ascend, when you are on high, and set your mouth against the heavens? Descend that you may ascend, and ascend to God. For you have fallen by

ascending against Him. Tell them this, that they may weep in the valley of tears, and so draw them with you to God, because it is by His Spirit that you speak thus unto them, if you speak burning with the fire of love.

Chapter 13. Love Originates from Grace and Beauty Enticing Us.

These things I knew not at that time, and I loved these lower beauties, and I was sinking to the very depths; and I said to my friends, Do we love anything but the beautiful? What, then, is the beautiful? And what is beauty? What is it that allures and unites us to the things we love; for unless there were a grace and beauty in them, they could by no means attract us to them? And I marked and perceived that in bodies themselves there was a beauty from their forming a kind of whole, and another from mutual fitness, as one part of the body with its whole, or a shoe with a foot, and so on. And this consideration sprang up in my mind out of the recesses of my heart, and I wrote books (two or three, I think) on the fair and fit. You know, O Lord, for it has escaped me; for I have them not, but they have strayed from me, I know not how.

Chapter 14. Concerning the Books Which He Wrote On the Fair and Fit, Dedicated to Hierius.

But what was it that prompted me, O Lord my God, to dedicate these books to Hierius, an orator of Rome, whom I knew not by sight, but loved the man for the fame of his learning, for which he was renowned, and some words of his which I had heard, and which had pleased me? But the more did he please me in that he pleased others, who highly extolled him, astonished that a native of Syria, instructed first in Greek eloquence, should afterwards become a wonderful Latin orator, and one so well versed in studies pertaining unto wisdom. Thus a man is commended and loved when absent. Does this love enter into the heart of the hearer from the mouth of the commender? Not so. But through one who loves is another inflamed. For hence he is loved who is commended when the commender is believed to praise him with an unfeigned heart; that is, when he that loves him praises him.

Thus, then, loved I men upon the judgment of men, not upon Yours, O my God, in which no man is deceived. But yet why not as the renowned charioteer, as the huntsman known far and wide by a vulgar popularity — but far otherwise, and seriously, and so as I would desire to be myself commended? For I would not that they should commend and love me as actors are — although I myself did commend and love them — but I would prefer being unknown than so known, and even being hated than so loved. Where now are these influences of such various and various kinds of loves distributed in one soul? What is it that I am in love with in another, which, if I did not hate, I should not detest and repel from myself, seeing we are equally men? For it does not follow that because a good horse is loved by him who would not, though he might, be that horse, the same should therefore be affirmed by an actor, who partakes of our nature. Do I then love in a man that which I, who am a man, hate to be? Man himself is a great deep, whose very hairs You number, O Lord, and they fall not to the ground without You. Matthew 10:29-30 And yet are the hairs of his head more readily numbered than are his affections and the movements of his heart.

But that orator was of the kind that I so loved as I wished myself to be such a one; and I erred through an inflated pride, and was carried about with every wind, Ephesians 4:14 but yet was piloted by You, though very secretly. And whence know I, and whence confidently confess I unto You that I loved him more because of the love of those who praised him, than for the very things for which they praised him? Because had he been upraised, and these self-same men had dispraised him, and with dispraise and scorn told the same things of him, I should never have been so inflamed and provoked to love him. And yet the things had not been different, nor he himself different, but only the affections of the narrators. See where lies the impotent soul that is not yet sustained by the solidity of truth! Just as the blasts of tongues blow from the breasts of conjecturers, so is it tossed this way and that, driven forward and backward, and the light is obscured to it and the truth not perceived. And behold it is before us. And to me it was a great matter that my style and studies should be known to that man; the which if he approved, I were the more stimulated, but if he disapproved, this vain heart of mine, void of Your solidity, had been offended. And yet that fair and fit, about which I wrote to him, I reflected on with pleasure, and contemplated it, and admired it, though none joined me in doing so.

Chapter 15. While Writing, Being Blinded by Corporeal Images, He Failed to Recognise the Spiritual Nature of God.

But not yet did I perceive the hinge on which this impotent matter turned in Your wisdom, O Thou Omnipotent, who alone does great wonders; and my mind ranged through corporeal forms, and I defined and distinguished as fair, that which is so in itself, and fit, that which is beautiful as it corresponds to some other thing; and this I supported by corporeal examples. And I turned my attention to the nature of the mind, but the false opinions which I entertained of spiritual things prevented me from seeing the truth. Yet the very power of truth forced itself on my gaze, and I turned away my throbbing soul from incorporeal substance, to lineaments, and colors, and bulky magnitudes. And not being able to perceive these in the mind, I thought I could not perceive my mind. And whereas in virtue I loved peace, and in viciousness I hated discord, in the former I distinguished unity, but in the latter a kind of division. And in that unity I conceived the rational soul and the nature of truth and of the chief good to consist. But in this division I, unfortunate one, imagined there was I know not what substance of irrational life, and the nature of the chief evil, which should not be a substance only, but real life also, and yet not emanating from You, O my God, from whom are all things. And yet the first I called a Monad, as if it had been a soul without sex, but the other a Duad — anger in deeds of violence, in deeds of passion, lust — not knowing of what I talked. For I had not known or learned that neither was evil a substance, nor our soul that chief and unchangeable good.

For even as it is in the case of deeds of violence, if that emotion of the soul from whence the stimulus comes be depraved, and carry itself insolently and mutinously; and in acts of passion, if that affection of the soul whereby carnal pleasures are imbibed is unrestrained — so do errors and false opinions contaminate the life, if the reasonable soul itself be depraved, as it was at that time in me, who was ignorant that it must be enlightened by another light that it may be partaker of truth, seeing that itself is not that nature of truth. For You will light my candle; the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness; and of His fullness have all we received, John 1:16 for that was the true Light which lighted every

man that comes into the world; John 1:9 for in You there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.
James 1:17

But I pressed towards You, and was repelled by You that I might taste of death, for You resist the proud. But what prouder than for me, with a marvellous madness, to assert myself to be that by nature which You are? For whereas I was mutable — so much being clear to me, for my very longing to become wise arose from the wish from worse to become better — yet chose I rather to think You mutable, than myself not to be that which You are. Therefore was I repelled by You, and You resisted my changeable stiffneckedness; and I imagined corporeal forms, and, being flesh, I accused flesh, and, being a wind that passes away, I returned not to You, but went wandering and wandering on towards those things that have no being, neither in You, nor in me, nor in the body. Neither were they created for me by Your truth, but conceived by my vain conceit out of corporeal things. And I used to ask Your faithful little ones, my fellow-citizens — from whom I unconsciously stood exiled — I used flippantly and foolishly to ask, Why, then, does the soul which God created err? But I would not permit any one to ask me, Why, then, does God err? And I contended that Your immutable substance erred of constraint, rather than admit that my mutable substance had gone astray of free will, and erred as a punishment.

I was about six or seven and twenty years of age when I wrote those volumes — meditating upon corporeal fictions, which clamoured in the ears of my heart. These I directed, O sweet Truth, to Your inward melody, pondering on the fair and fit, and longing to stay and listen to You, and to rejoice greatly at the Bridegroom's voice, John 3:29 and I could not; for by the voices of my own errors was I driven forth, and by the weight of my own pride was I sinking into the lowest pit. For You did not make me to hear joy and gladness; nor did the bones which were not yet humbled rejoice.

Chapter 16. He Very Easily Understood the Liberal Arts and the Categories of Aristotle, But Without True Fruit.

And what did it profit me that, when scarce twenty years old, a book of Aristotle's, entitled *The Ten Predicaments*, fell into my hands — on whose very name I hung as on something great and divine, when my rhetoric master of Carthage, and others who were esteemed learned, referred to it with cheeks swelling with pride — I read it alone and understood it? And on my conferring with others, who said that with the assistance of very able masters — who not only explained it orally, but drew many things in the dust — they scarcely understood it, and could tell me no more about it than I had acquired in reading it by myself alone? And the book appeared to me to speak plainly enough of substances, such as man is, and of their qualities, — such as the figure of a man, of what kind it is; and his stature, how many feet high; and his relationship, whose brother he is; or where placed, or when born; or whether he stands or sits, or is shod or armed, or does or suffers anything; and whatever innumerable things might be classed under these nine categories, — of which I have given some examples — or under that chief category of substance.

What did all this profit me, seeing it even hindered me, when, imagining that whatsoever existed was comprehended in those ten categories, I tried so to understand, O my God, Your wonderful and unchangeable unity as if Thou also had been subjected to Your own greatness or beauty, so that they should exist in You as their subject, like as in bodies, whereas You Yourself art Your greatness and beauty? But a body is not great or fair because it is a body, seeing that, though it were less great or fair, it should nevertheless be a body. But that which I had conceived of You was falsehood, not truth — fictions of

my misery, not the supports of Your blessedness. For You had commanded, and it was done in me, that the earth should bring forth briars and thorns to me, Isaiah 32:13 and that with labour I should get my bread. Genesis 3:19

And what did it profit me that I, the base slave of vile affections, read unaided, and understood, all the books that I could get of the so-called liberal arts? And I took delight in them, but knew not whence came whatever in them was true and certain. For my back then was to the light, and my face towards the things enlightened; whence my face, with which I discerned the things enlightened, was not itself enlightened. Whatever was written either on rhetoric or logic, geometry, music, or arithmetic, did I, without any great difficulty, and without the teaching of any man, understand, as You know, O Lord my God, because both quickness of comprehension and acuteness of perception are Your gifts. Yet did I not thereupon sacrifice to You. So, then, it served not to my use, but rather to my destruction, since I went about to get so good a portion of my substance Luke 15:12 into my own power; and I kept not my strength for You, but went away from You into a far country, to waste it upon harlotries. Luke 15:13 For what did good abilities profit me, if I did not employ them to good uses? For I did not perceive that those arts were acquired with great difficulty, even by the studious and those gifted with genius, until I endeavoured to explain them to such; and he was the most proficient in them who followed my explanations not too slowly.

But what did this profit me, supposing that Thou, O Lord God, the Truth, were a bright and vast body, and I a piece of that body? Perverseness too great! But such was I. Nor do I blush, O my God, to confess to You Your mercies towards me, and to call upon You — I, who blushed not then to avow before men my blasphemies, and to bark against You. What profited me then my nimble wit in those sciences and all those knotty volumes, disentangled by me without help from a human master, seeing that I erred so odiously, and with such sacrilegious baseness, in the doctrine of piety? Or what impediment was it to Your little ones to have a far slower wit, seeing that they departed not far from You, that in the nest of Your Church they might safely become fledged, and nourish the wings of charity by the food of a sound faith? O Lord our God, under the shadow of Your wings let us hope, defend us, and carry us. You will carry us both when little, and even to grey hairs will You carry us; Isaiah 46:4 for our firmness, when it is Thou, then is it firmness; but when it is our own, then it is infirmity. Our good lives always with You, from which when we are averted we are perverted. Let us now, O Lord, return, that we be not overturned, because with You our good lives without any eclipse, which good You Yourself art. And we need not fear lest we should find no place unto which to return because we fell away from it; for when we were absent, our home — Your Eternity — fell not.

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