

SAINT AUGUSTINE
CONFESSIONS

Translated with an Introduction by

R. S. PINE-COFFIN



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BOOK X

I

LET me know you, for you are the God who knows me; *let me recognize you as you have recognized me.*¹ You are the power of my soul; come into it and make it fit for yourself, so that you may have it and hold it *without stain or wrinkle.*² This is my hope; this is why I speak as I do; this is the hope that brings me joy, when my joy is in what is to save me. As for the other things in life, the more we weep for them, the less they merit our tears, and the fewer tears we shed for them, the more we ought to weep for them. We know that *you are a lover of faithfulness,*³ *for the man whose life is true comes to the light.*⁴ I wish to act in truth, making my confession both in my heart before you and in this book before the many who will read it.

2

O Lord, the depths of man's conscience lie bare before your eyes. Could anything of mine remain hidden from you, even if I refused to confess it? I should only be shielding my eyes from seeing you, not hiding myself from you. But now that I have the evidence of my own misery to prove to me how displeasing I am to myself, you are my light and my joy. It is you whom I love and desire, so that I am ashamed of myself and cast myself aside and choose you instead, and I please neither you nor myself except in you.

So, O Lord, all that I am is laid bare before you. I have declared how it profits me to confess to you. And I make my confession, not in words and sounds made by the tongue alone, but with the voice of my soul and in my thoughts which cry aloud to you. Your ear can hear them. For when I am sinful, if I am displeased with myself, this is a confession that I make to you; and when I am good, if I do not claim the merit for myself, this too is confession. For you, O Lord,

¹ 1 Cor. 13: 12. ² Eph. 5: 27. ³ Ps. 50: 8 (51: 6). ⁴ John 3: 21.

give your benediction to the just,¹ but first you make a just man of the sinner.² And so my confession is made both silently in your sight, my God, and aloud as well, because even though my tongue utters no sound, my heart cries to you. For whatever good I may speak to men you have heard it before in my heart, and whatever good you hear in my heart, you have first spoken to me yourself.

3

Why, then, does it matter to me whether men should hear what I have to confess, as though it were they who were to cure all the evil that is in me? They are an inquisitive race, always anxious to pry into other men's lives, but never ready to correct their own. Why do they wish to hear from me what sort of man I am, though they will not listen to you when you tell them what they are? When they hear me speak about myself, how do they know whether I am telling the truth, since no one *knows a man's thoughts, except the man's own spirit that is within him?*³ But if they listen to what you tell them about themselves, they cannot say 'The Lord is lying', for to heed what you tell them about themselves is simply to recognize themselves for what they are. And if a man recognizes his true self, can he possibly say 'This is false', unless he is himself a liar? But charity believes all things – all things, that is, which are spoken by those who are joined as one in charity – and for this reason I, too, O Lord, make my confession aloud in the hearing of men. For although I cannot prove to them that my confessions are true, at least I shall be believed by those whose ears are opened to me by charity.

Physician of my soul, make me see clearly how it profits me to do this. You have forgiven my past sins and drawn a veil over them, and in this way you have given me happiness in yourself, changing my life by faith and your sacrament. But when others read of those past sins of mine, or hear about them, their hearts are stirred so that they no longer lie listless in despair, crying 'I cannot'. Instead their hearts are roused by the love of your mercy and the joy of your grace, by which each one of us, weak though he be, is made strong, since by it he is made conscious of his own weakness. And the good are glad to hear of the past sins of others who are now free of them.

¹ Ps. 5: 13 (5: 12). ² Rom. 4: 5. ³ 1 Cor. 2: 11.

They are glad, not because those sins are evil, but because what was evil is now evil no more.

What does it profit me, then, O Lord, to whom my conscience confesses daily, confident more in the hope of your mercy than in its own innocence, what does it profit me, I ask, also to make known to men in your sight, through this book, not what I once was, but what I am now? I know what profit I gain by confessing my past, and this I have declared. But many people who know me, and others who do not know me but have heard of me or read my books, wish to hear what I am now, at this moment, as I set down my confessions. They cannot lay their ears to my heart, and yet it is in my heart that I am whatever I am. So they wish to listen as I confess what I am in my heart, into which they cannot pry by eye or ear or mind. They wish to hear and they are ready to believe; but can they really know me? Charity, which makes them good, tells them that I do not lie about myself when I confess what I am, and it is this charity in them that believes me.

4

But what good do they hope will be done if they listen to what I say? Is it that they wish to join with me in thanking you, when they hear how close I have come to you by your grace, and to pray for me, when they hear how far I am set apart from you by the burden of my sins? If this is what they wish, I shall tell them what I am. For no small good is gained, O Lord my God, if many offer you thanks for me and many pray to you for me. Let all who are truly my brothers love in me what they know from your teaching to be worthy of their love, and let them sorrow to find in me what they know from your teaching to be occasion for remorse. This is what I wish my true brothers to feel in their hearts. I do not speak of strangers or of *alien foes, who make treacherous promises, and lift their hands in perjury.*¹ But my true brothers are those who rejoice for me in their hearts when they find good in me, and grieve for me when they find sin. They are my true brothers, because whether they see good in me or evil, they love me still. To such as these I shall reveal what I am. Let them breathe a sigh of joy for what is good in me and a sigh of grief for what is bad. The good I do is done by you in me and by your grace:

¹ Ps. 143: 8 (144: 8).

the evil is my fault; it is the punishment you send me. Let my brothers draw their breath in joy for the one and sigh with grief for the other. Let hymns of thanksgiving and cries of sorrow rise together from their hearts, as though they were vessels burning with incense before you. And I pray you, O Lord, to be pleased with the incense that rises in your holy temple and, for your name's sake, to *have mercy on me, as you are ever rich in mercy.*¹ Do not relinquish what you have begun, but make perfect what is still imperfect in me.

So, if I go on to confess, not what I was, but what I am, the good that comes of it is this. There is joy in my heart when I confess to you, yet there is fear as well; there is sorrow, and yet hope. But I confess not only to you but also to the believers among men, all who share my joy and all who, like me, are doomed to die; all who are my fellows in your kingdom and all who accompany me on this pilgrimage, whether they have gone before or are still to come or are with me as I make my way through life. They are your servants and my brothers. You have chosen them to be your sons. You have named them as the masters whom I am to serve if I wish to live with you and in your grace. This is your bidding, but it would hold less meaning for me if it were made known to me in words alone and I had not the example of Christ, who has shown me the way by his deeds as well. I do your bidding in word and deed alike. I do it beneath the protection of your wings, for the peril would be too great if it were not that my soul has submitted to you and sought the shelter of your wings and that my weakness is known to you. I am no more than a child, but my Father lives for ever and I have a Protector great enough to save me. For he who begot me and he who watches over me are one and the same, and for me there is no good but you, the Almighty, who are with me even before I am with you. So to such as you command me to serve I will reveal, not what I have been, but what I have become and what I am. But, since I do not *scrutinize my own conduct,*² let my words be understood as they are meant.

5

It is you, O Lord, who judge me. For though no one *can know a man's thoughts, except the man's own spirit that is within him,*³ there are some

¹ Ps. 50: 3 (51: 1). ² 1 Cor. 4: 3. ³ 1 Cor. 2: 11.

things in man which even his own spirit within him does not know. But you, O Lord, know all there is to know of him, because you made him. Yet though, in your sight, I despise myself and consider myself as mere dust and ashes, there is one thing that I know about you which I do not know about myself. I know that it is impossible for you to suffer harm, whereas I do not know which temptations I can resist and which I cannot. This much I know, although *at present I am looking at a confused reflection in a mirror, not yet face to face,*¹ and therefore, as long as I am away from you, during my pilgrimage, I am more aware of myself than of you. But my hope lies in the knowledge that *you do not play us false; you will not allow us to be tempted beyond our powers. With the temptation itself, you will ordain the issue of it, and enable us to hold our own.*²

I shall therefore confess both what I know of myself and what I do not know. For even what I know about myself I only know because your light shines upon me; and what I do not know about myself I shall continue not to know until I see you face to face and *my dusk is noonday.*³

6

My love of you, O Lord, is not some vague feeling: it is positive and certain. Your word struck into my heart and from that moment I loved you. Besides this, all about me, heaven and earth and all that they contain proclaim that I should love you, and their message never ceases to sound in the ears of all mankind, so that there is no excuse for any not to love you. But, more than all this, *you will show pity on those whom you pity; you will show mercy where you are merciful,*⁴ for if it were not for your mercy, heaven and earth would cry your praises to deaf ears.

But what do I love when I love my God? Not material beauty or beauty of a temporal order; not the brilliance of earthly light, so welcome to our eyes; not the sweet melody of harmony and song; not the fragrance of flowers, perfumes, and spices; not manna or honey; not limbs such as the body delights to embrace. It is not these that I love when I love my God. And yet, when I love him, it is true that I love a light of a certain kind, a voice, a perfume, a food, an embrace; but they are of the kind that I love in my inner self, when

¹ 1 Cor. 13: 12. ² 1 Cor. 10: 13 ³ Is. 58: 10. ⁴ Rom. 9: 15.

my soul is bathed in light that is not bound by space; when it listens to sound that never dies away; when it breathes fragrance that is not borne away on the wind; when it tastes food that is never consumed by the eating; when it clings to an embrace from which it is not severed by fulfilment of desire. This is what I love when I love my God.

But what is my God? I put my question to the earth. It answered, 'I am not God', and all things on earth declared the same. I asked the sea and the chasms of the deep and the living things that creep in them, but they answered, 'We are not your God. Seek what is above us.' I spoke to the winds that blow, and the whole air and all that lives in it replied, 'Anaximenes¹ is wrong. I am not God.' I asked the sky, the sun, the moon, and the stars, but they told me, 'Neither are we the God whom you seek.' I spoke to all the things that are about me, all that can be admitted by the door of the senses, and I said, 'Since you are not my God, tell me about him. Tell me something of my God.' Clear and loud they answered, 'God is he who made us.' I asked these questions simply by gazing at these things, and their beauty was all the answer they gave.

Then I turned to myself and asked, 'Who are you?' 'A man,' I replied. But it is clear that I have both body and soul, the one the outer, the other the inner part of me. Which of these two ought I to have asked to help me find my God? With my bodily powers I had already tried to find him in earth and sky, as far as the sight of my eyes could reach, like an envoy sent upon a search. But my inner self is the better of the two, for it was to the inner part of me that my bodily senses brought their messages. They delivered to their arbiter and judge the replies which they carried back from the sky and the earth and all that they contain, those replies which stated 'We are not God' and 'God is he who made us'. The inner part of man knows these things through the agency of the outer part. I, the inner man, know these things; I, the soul, know them through the senses of my body. I asked the whole mass of the universe about my God, and it replied, 'I am not God. God is he who made me.'

Surely everyone whose senses are not impaired is aware of the universe around him? Why, then, does it not give the same message

¹ Anaximenes of Miletus, the philosopher, who lived in the sixth century B.C. His teaching was that air is the first cause of all things.

to us all? The animals, both great and small, are aware of it, but they cannot inquire into its meaning because they are not guided by reason, which can sift the evidence relayed to them by their senses. Man, on the other hand, can question nature. He is able to *catch sight of God's invisible nature through his creatures*,¹ but his love of these material things is too great. He becomes their slave, and slaves cannot be judges. Nor will the world supply an answer to those who question it, unless they also have the faculty to judge it. It does not answer in different language – that is, it does not change its aspect – according to whether a man merely looks at it or subjects it to inquiry while he looks. If it did, its appearance would be different in each case. Its aspect is the same in both cases, but to the man who merely looks it says nothing, while to the other it gives an answer. It would be nearer the truth to say that it gives an answer to all, but it is only understood by those who compare the message it gives them through their senses with the truth that is in themselves. For truth says to me, 'Your God is not heaven or earth or any kind of bodily thing.' We can tell this from the very nature of such things, for those who have eyes to see know that their bulk is less in the part than in the whole. And I know that my soul is the better part of me, because it animates the whole of my body. It gives it life, and this is something that no body can give to another body. But God is even more. He is the Life of the life of my soul.

7

What, then, do I love when I love God? Who is this Being who is so far above my soul? If I am to reach him, it must be through my soul. But I must go beyond the power by which I am joined to my body and by which I fill its frame with life. This is not the power by which I can find my God, for if it were, *the horse and the mule, senseless creatures*,² could find him too, because they also have this same power which gives life to their bodies. But there is another faculty in me besides this. By it I not only give life to my body but also give it the power of perceiving things by its senses. God gave me this faculty when he ordered my eyes not to hear but to see and my ears not to see but to hear. And to each of the other senses he assigned its own place and its own function. I, the soul, who am one alone, exercise

¹ Rom. 1: 20. ² Ps. 31: 9 (32: 9).

all these different functions by means of my senses. But I must go beyond this faculty as well, for horses and mules also have it, since they too feel by means of their bodies.

8

So I must also go beyond this natural faculty of mine, as I rise by stages towards the God who made me. The next stage is memory, which is like a great field or a spacious palace, a storehouse for countless images of all kinds which are conveyed to it by the senses. In it are stored away all the thoughts by which we enlarge upon or diminish or modify in any way the perceptions at which we arrive through the senses, and it also contains anything else that has been entrusted to it for safe keeping, until such time as these things are swallowed up and buried in forgetfulness. When I use my memory, I ask it to produce whatever it is that I wish to remember. Some things it produces immediately; some are forthcoming only after a delay, as though they were being brought out from some inner hiding place; others come spilling from the memory, thrusting themselves upon us when what we want is something quite different, as much as to say 'Perhaps we are what you want to remember?' These I brush aside from the picture which memory presents to me, allowing my mind to pick what it chooses, until finally that which I wish to see stands out clearly and emerges into sight from its hiding place. Some memories present themselves easily and in the correct order just as I require them. They come and give place in their turn to others that follow upon them, and as their place is taken they return to their place of storage, ready to emerge again when I want them. This is what happens when I recite something by heart.

In the memory everything is preserved separately, according to its category. Each is admitted through its own special entrance. For example, light, colour, and shape are admitted through the eyes; sound of all kinds through the ears; all sorts of smell through the nostrils; and every kind of taste through the mouth. The sense of touch, which is common to all parts of the body, enables us to distinguish between hard and soft, hot and cold, rough and smooth, heavy and light, and it can be applied to things which are inside the body as well as to those which are outside it. All these sensations are

retained in the great storehouse of the memory, which in some indescribable way secretes them in its folds. They can be brought out and called back again when they are needed, but each enters the memory through its own gateway and is retained in it. The things which we sense do not enter the memory themselves, but their images are there ready to present themselves to our thoughts when we recall them.

We may know by which of the senses these images were recorded and laid up in the memory, but who can tell how the images themselves are formed? Even when I am in darkness and in silence I can, if I wish, picture colours in my memory. I can distinguish between black and white and any other colours that I wish. And while I reflect upon them, sounds do not break in and confuse the images of colour, which reached me through the eye. Yet my memory holds sounds as well, though it stores them separately. If I wish, I can summon them too. They come forward at once, so that I can sing as much as I want, even though my tongue does not move and my throat utters no sound. And when I recall into my mind this rich reserve of sound, which entered my memory through my ears, the images of colour, which are also there in my memory, do not interfere or intrude. In the same way I can recall at will all the other things which my other senses brought into my memory and deposited in it. I can distinguish the scent of lilies from that of violets, even though there is no scent at all in my nostrils, and simply by using my memory I recognize that I like honey better than wine and smooth things better than rough ones, although at that moment I neither taste nor touch anything.

All this goes on inside me, in the vast cloisters of my memory. In it are the sky, the earth, and the sea, ready at my summons, together with everything that I have ever perceived in them by my senses, except the things which I have forgotten. In it I meet myself as well. I remember myself and what I have done, when and where I did it, and the state of my mind at the time. In my memory, too, are all the events that I remember, whether they are things that have happened to me or things that I have heard from others. From the same source I can picture to myself all kinds of different images based either upon my own experience or upon what I find credible because it tallies with my own experience. I can fit them into the general picture of

the past; from them I can make a surmise of actions and events and hopes for the future; and I can contemplate them all over again as if they were actually present. If I say to myself in the vast cache of my mind, where all those images of great things are stored, 'I shall do this or that', the picture of this or that particular thing comes into my mind at once. Or I may say to myself 'If only this or that would happen!' or 'God forbid that this or that should be!' No sooner do I say this than the images of all the things of which I speak spring forward from the same great treasure-house of the memory. And, in fact, I could not even mention them at all if the images were lacking.

The power of the memory is prodigious, my God. It is a vast, immeasurable sanctuary. Who can plumb its depths? And yet it is a faculty of my soul. Although it is part of my nature, I cannot understand all that I am. This means, then, that the mind is too narrow to contain itself entirely. But where is that part of it which it does not itself contain? Is it somewhere outside itself and not within it? How, then, can it be part of it, if it is not contained in it?

I am lost in wonder when I consider this problem. It bewilders me. Yet men go out and gaze in astonishment at high mountains, the huge waves of the sea, the broad reaches of rivers, the ocean that encircles the world, or the stars in their courses. But they pay no attention to themselves. They do not marvel at the thought that while I have been mentioning all these things, I have not been looking at them with my eyes, and that I could not even speak of mountains or waves, rivers or stars, which are things that I have seen, or of the ocean, which I know only on the evidence of others, unless I could see them in my mind's eye, in my memory, and with the same vast spaces between them that would be there if I were looking at them in the world outside myself. When I saw them with the sight of my eyes, I did not draw them bodily into myself. They are not inside me themselves, but only their images. And I know which of my senses imprinted each image on my mind.

But these are not the only treasures stored in the vast capacity of my memory. It also contains all that I have ever learnt of the liberal sciences, except what I have forgotten. This knowledge it keeps

apart from the rest, in an inner place – though it is wrong to speak of it as a place – and in their case it does not retain mere images but the facts themselves. For any knowledge I may have of grammar, or of the art of debating, or of the different categories of questions, remains in my memory, but not as though I merely retained an image of it, leaving the facts outside myself, or as though it had sounded in my ear and then passed away. It is not like a voice which is imprinted on the mind through the ears, leaving a trace by which it can be recalled, as if its sound were still to be heard even after it has become silent. Nor is it like an odour which, even though it does not last and is carried away on the wind, affects the sense of smell and through it conveys to the memory an impression of itself, by which it can be remembered and reproduced. It is not like food, which certainly loses its taste once it reaches the belly, and yet can be said to retain its taste in the memory. Again, it is unlike anything which the body feels by the sense of touch and can still be sensed in the memory even after contact with it is lost. In these cases the things themselves do not penetrate into the memory. It is simply that the memory captures their images with astonishing speed and stores them away in its wonderful system of compartments, ready to produce them again in just as wonderful a way when we remember them.

When I am told that it is possible to ask three kinds of question – whether a thing is, what it is, and of what sort it is – I retain images of the sounds of which these words are composed. I know that these sounds have passed through the air and now are no more. But the facts which they represent have not reached me through any of my bodily senses. I could not see them at all except in my mind, and it is not their images that I store in my memory but the facts themselves. But they must themselves tell me, if they can, by what means they entered my mind. For I can run through all the organs of sense, which are the body's gateways to the mind, but I cannot find any by which these facts could have entered. My eyes tell me 'If they have colour, we reported them'. My ears say 'If they have sound, it was we who gave notice of them'. My nose says 'If they have any smell, it was through me that they passed into the mind'. The sense of taste says

'If they have no taste, do not put your question to me'. The sense of touch says 'If it is not a body, I did not touch it, and if I did not touch it, I had no message to transmit'.

How, then, did these facts get into my memory? Where did they come from? I do not know. When I learned them, I did not believe them with another man's mind. It was my own mind which recognized them and admitted that they were true. I entrusted them to my own mind as though it were a place of storage from which I could produce them at will. Therefore they must have been in my mind even before I learned them, though not present to my memory. Then whereabouts in my mind were they? How was it that I recognized them when they were mentioned and agreed that they were true? It must have been that they were already in my memory, hidden away in its deeper recesses, in so remote a part of it that I might not have been able to think of them at all, if some other person had not brought them to the fore by teaching me about them.

11

From this we can conclude that learning these facts, which do not reach our minds as images by means of the senses but are recognized by us in our minds, without images, as they actually are, is simply a process of thought by which we gather together things which, although they are muddled and confused, are already contained in the memory. When we give them our attention, we see to it that these facts, which have been lying scattered and unheeded, are placed ready to hand, so that they are easily forthcoming once we have grown used to them. My memory holds a great number of facts of this sort, things which I have already discovered and, as I have said, placed ready to hand. This is what is meant by saying that we have learnt them and know them. If, for a short space of time, I cease to give them my attention, they sink back and recede again into the more remote cells of my memory, so that I have to think them out again, like a fresh set of facts, if I am to know them. I have to shepherd them out again from their old lairs, because there is no other place where they can have gone. In other words, once they have been dispersed, I have to collect them again, and this is the derivation of the word *cogitare*, which means *to think* or *to collect one's thoughts*. For

in Latin the word *cogo*, meaning *I assemble* or *I collect*, is related to *cogito*, which means *I think*, in the same way as *ago* is related to *agito* or *facio* to *factito*. But the word *cogito* is restricted to the function of the mind. It is correctly used only of what is assembled in the mind, not what is assembled elsewhere.

12

The memory also contains the innumerable principles and laws of numbers and dimensions. None of these can have been conveyed to it by means of the bodily senses, because they cannot be seen, heard, smelled, tasted, or touched. I have heard the sounds of the words by which their meaning is expressed when they are discussed, but the words are one thing and the principles another. The words may sometimes be spoken in Latin and at other times in Greek, but the principles are neither Greek nor Latin. They are not language at all. I have seen lines drawn by architects, and they are sometimes as fine as the thread spun by spiders. But these principles are different. They are not images of things which the eye of my body has reported to me. We know them simply by recognizing them inside ourselves without reference to any material object. With all the senses of my body I have become aware of numbers as they are used in counting things. But the principle of number, by which we count, is not the same. It is not an image of the things we count, but something which is there in its own right. If anyone is blind to it, he may laugh at my words: I shall pity him for his ridicule.

13

I carry all these facts in my memory, and I also remember how I learned them. I have also heard, and remember, many false arguments put forward to dispute them. Even if the arguments are false, the fact that I remember them is not false. I also remember distinguishing between the true facts and the false theories advanced against them, and there is a difference between seeing myself make this distinction now and remembering that I have made it often in the past, every time that I have given the matter any thought. So I not only remember that I have often understood these facts in the past,

but I also commit to memory the fact that I understand them and distinguish the truth from the falsehood at the present moment. By this means I ensure that later on I shall remember that I understood them at this time. And I remember that I have remembered, just as later on, if I remember that I have been able to remember these facts now, it will be by the power of my memory that I shall remember doing so.

14

My memory also contains my feelings, not in the same way as they are present to the mind when it experiences them, but in a quite different way that is in keeping with the special powers of the memory. For even when I am unhappy I can remember times when I was cheerful, and when I am cheerful I can remember past unhappiness. I can recall past fears and yet not feel afraid, and when I remember that I once wanted something, I can do so without wishing to have it now. Sometimes memory induces the opposite feeling, for I can be glad to remember sorrow that is over and done with and sorry to remember happiness that has come to an end. There would be nothing remarkable in this if memory recalled only our bodily sensations, for the mind is one thing and the body another, and it would not be strange if I were glad to remember some bygone bodily pain. But the mind and the memory are one and the same. We even call the memory the mind, for when we tell another person to remember something, we say 'See that you bear this in mind', and when we forget something, we say 'It was not in my mind' or 'It slipped out of my mind'. This being so, how can it be that, when I am glad to remember sorrow that is past – that is, when there is joy in my mind and sadness in my memory – how can it be that my mind is happy because of the joy that is in it and yet my memory is not sad by reason of the sadness that is in it? No one could pretend that the memory does not belong to the mind. We might say that the memory is a sort of stomach for the mind, and that joy or sadness are like sweet or bitter food. When this food is committed to the memory, it is as though it had passed into the stomach where it can remain but also loses its taste. Of course it is absurd to suppose that the memory is like the stomach, but there is some similarity none the less.

But when I say that the mind can experience four kinds of emo-

tion – desire, joy, fear, and sorrow – I call them to mind from my memory, and if I enlarge upon this by analysing and defining each of these emotions according to the different forms which each can take, I draw upon my memory and produce from it whatever I am going to say. Yet while I remember these feelings by drawing them from my memory, they do not produce any emotional effect in me. Before I recalled them and thought about them, they must have been present in my memory, because it was from there that I was able to summon them by the act of remembering. Perhaps these emotions are brought forward from the memory by the act of remembering in the same way as cattle bring up food from the stomach when they chew the cud. But if this is so, when a man discusses them – that is, when he recalls them to mind – why does he not experience the pleasure of joy or the pain of sorrow in his mind, just as the animal tastes the food in its mouth? Perhaps the simile is unjustified, because the two processes are not alike in all points. For if we had to experience sorrow or fear every time that we mentioned these emotions, no one would be willing to speak of them. Yet we could not speak of them at all unless we could find in our memory not only the sounds of their names, which we retain as images imprinted on the memory by the senses of the body, but also the ideas of the emotions themselves. But we did not admit these ideas through any of the body's gateways to the mind. They were either committed to the memory by the mind itself, as a result of its own experience of emotion, or else the memory retained them even though they were not entrusted to it by the mind.

15

Whether this process takes place by means of images or not, it is not easy to say. I can mention a stone or the sun when these things are not actually present to my senses, but their images are present in my memory. I can speak of physical pain, but as long as I do not feel it, the pain itself is not present to me. Yet if an image of pain were not present in my memory, I should not know how to describe it nor could I distinguish it from pleasure when I spoke of it. I can talk of physical health when I am in good health. The condition of which I speak is present to me. But unless an image of it were also present in

my memory, I could not possibly remember what the sound of the word meant, nor could sick people know what was meant when health was mentioned, unless an image of it were retained by the power of memory even when health itself is absent from the body. I can speak of the numbers which we use in counting, but it is the numbers themselves, not their images, which are present in my memory. I speak of the sun's image, and this too is in my memory, but it is the image itself, not the image of an image, that I recall. It is the sun's image that presents itself to my mind when I perform the act of remembering. I can speak of memory and I recognize what I speak of. But where else do I recognize it except in my memory itself? Can it be that the memory is not present to itself in its own right but only by means of an image of itself?

16

I can mention forgetfulness and recognize what the word means, but how can I recognize the thing itself unless I remember it? I am not speaking of the sound of the word but of the thing which it signifies. If I had forgotten the thing itself, I should be utterly unable to recognize what the sound implied. When I remember memory, my memory is present to itself by its own power; but when I remember forgetfulness, two things are present, memory, by which I remember it, and forgetfulness, which is what I remember. Yet what is forgetfulness but absence of memory? When it is present, I cannot remember. Then how can it be present in such a way that I can remember it? If it is true that what we remember we retain in our memory, and if it is also true that unless we remembered forgetfulness, we could not possibly recognize the meaning of the word when we heard it, then it is true that forgetfulness is retained in the memory. It follows that the very thing which by its presence causes us to forget must be present if we are to remember it. Are we to understand from this that, when we remember it, it is not itself present in the memory, but is only there by means of its image? For if forgetfulness were itself present, would not its effect be to make us forget, not to remember?

Who is to carry the research beyond this point? Who can understand the truth of the matter? O Lord, I am working hard in this

field, and the field of my labours is my own self. I have become a problem to myself, like land which a farmer works only with difficulty and at the cost of much sweat. For I am not now investigating the tracts of the heavens, or measuring the distance of the stars, or trying to discover how the earth hangs in space. I am investigating myself, my memory, my mind. There is nothing strange in the fact that whatever is not myself is far from me. But what could be nearer to me than myself? Yet I do not understand the power of memory that is in myself, although without it I could not even speak of myself. What am I to say, when I am quite certain that I can remember forgetfulness? Am I to say that what I remember is not in my memory? Or am I to say that the reason why forgetfulness is in my memory is to prevent me from forgetting? Both suggestions are utterly absurd. There is the third possibility, that I should say that when I remember forgetfulness, it is its image that is retained in my memory, not the thing itself. But how can I say this when, if the image of any thing is imprinted on the memory, the thing itself must first be present in order that the memory may receive the impression of its image? It is by this means that I remember Carthage and all the other places where I have been. By the same method I remember the faces of persons whom I have seen and everything that the other senses have reported to me. By it I remember the health and sickness of my own body. My memory captured images of these things when they were present, and the images remained so that I could see them and think about them by remembering them even when the things themselves were absent. Therefore, if forgetfulness is retained in the memory, not by itself, but by means of its image, it must have been present at some time in order that the memory could capture its image. But when it was present, how did it inscribe its image on the memory when its mere presence is enough to delete what is already noted there? Yet, however it may be, and in whatever inexplicable and incomprehensible way it happens, I am certain that I remember forgetfulness, even though forgetfulness obliterates all that we remember.

17

The power of the memory is great, O Lord. It is awe-inspiring in its profound and incalculable complexity. Yet it is my mind: it is my

self. What, then, am I, my God? What is my nature? A life that is ever varying, full of change, and of immense power. The wide plains of my memory and its innumerable caverns and hollows are full beyond compute of countless things of all kinds. Material things are there by means of their images; knowledge is there of itself; emotions are there in the form of ideas or impressions of some kind, for the memory retains them even while the mind does not experience them, although whatever is in the memory must also be in the mind. My mind has the freedom of them all. I can glide from one to the other. I can probe deep into them and never find the end of them. This is the power of memory! This is the great force of life in living man, mortal though he is!

My God, my true Life, what, then, am I to do? I shall go beyond this force that is in me, this force which we call memory, so that I may come to you, my Sweetness and my Light. What have you to say to me? You are always there above me, and as I rise up towards you in my mind, I shall go beyond even this force which is in me, this force which we call memory, longing to reach out to you by the only possible means and to cling to you in the only way in which it is possible to cling to you. For beasts and birds also have memory: otherwise they could never find their lairs or nests or the many other things which are part of their habitual life. In fact they could have no habits at all if it were not for their memory. So I must go beyond memory too, if I am to reach the God who made me different from the beasts that walk on the earth and wiser than the birds that fly in the air. I must pass beyond memory to find you, my true Good, my sure Sweetness. But where will the search lead me? Where am I to find you? If I find you beyond my memory, it means that I have no memory of you. How, then, am I to find you, if I have no memory of you?

18

The woman who had lost a coin searched for it by the light of a lantern,¹ but she would never have found it unless she had remembered it. Otherwise, when it was found, how would she have known whether it was the one she was looking for? I remember that I have often lost things and found them again after a search, and I know

¹ See Luke 15.

this because, when I was looking for them, people would ask me 'Is this it?' or 'Is that it?' and I always answered 'No', until they showed me the one thing I wanted. Whatever it was, unless I had remembered it, I should never have found it, even when it was shown to me, because I should not have recognized it. It is always the same when we look for something that we have lost and then find it. If a thing vanishes from sight but not from the memory – and this may happen with any visible object – its image is retained within us and we look for it until it comes to light again. Once it has been found it is recognized by means of the image within us. We do not say that we have found what was lost unless we recognize it, and we cannot recognize it unless we remember it. It was only lost to sight, not to the memory.

19

When, therefore, the memory loses something – and this is what happens whenever we forget something and try to remember it – where are we to look for it except in the memory itself? And if the memory offers us something else instead, as may happen, we reject what it offers until the one thing which we want is presented. When it is presented to us we say 'This is it', but we could not say this unless we recognized it, and we could not recognize it unless we remembered it. True enough, we had forgotten it. Or could it be that it had not entirely escaped our memory, but part of it remained, giving a clue to the remainder, because the memory, realizing that something was missing and feeling crippled by the loss of something to which it had grown accustomed, kept demanding that the missing part should be restored? Something of this sort happens when we see or think of a person whom we know, but cannot remember his name and try to recall it. If any other name but his occurs to us, we do not apply it to him, because we do not normally associate that name with him. So we reject all names until we think of the one which corresponds accurately with our normal mental picture of the man. But how can we think of his name unless we bring it out from the memory? For even if we recognize it because someone else prompts us, it is still by our own memory that we do so, because we do not accept it as a fresh piece of knowledge but agree that it is the right name, since we can now remember it. If the name were com-

pletely obliterated from our minds, we could not remember it even if we were prompted. For we do not entirely forget what we remember that we have forgotten. If we had completely forgotten it, we should not even be able to look for what was lost.

20

How, then, do I look for you, O Lord? For when I look for you, who are my God, I am looking for a life of blessed happiness. I shall look for you, so that my soul may live. For it is my soul that gives life to my body, and it is you who give life to my soul. How, then, am I to search for this blessed life? For I do not possess it until I can rightly say, 'This is all that I want. Happiness is here.' Am I to seek it in memory, as though I had forgotten it but still remembered that I had forgotten it? Or am I to seek it through the desire to get to know it as if it were something unknown to me, either because I have never known it or because I have forgotten it so completely that I do not even remember having forgotten it? Surely happiness is what everyone wants, so much so that there can be none who do not want it. But if they desire it so much, where did they learn what it was? If they have learnt to love it, where did they see it? Certainly happiness is in us, though how it comes to be there I cannot tell. Some people are happy in the sense that they have actually achieved a state of happiness. Others are happy only in the hope of achieving it. They possess happiness in a lesser degree than those who have achieved it, but even so they are better off than those who are happy neither in the achievement of this blessed state nor in the expectation of it. Yet even these others must possess happiness in a certain sense, otherwise they would not long for it as they do; and there can be no doubt that they do long for it. By some means or other they have learnt what it is. In some sense they have knowledge of it, and the problem before me is to discover whether or not this knowledge is in the memory. If it is, it means that at some time in the past we have been happy. It may be that we were all once happy individually, or it may be that we were all happy in Adam, the first sinner, in whom we all died and from whom we are all descended in a heritage of misery. But this is not the question which is now before me. The problem is whether happiness is in the memory. For we should not love happi-

ness unless we knew what it was. We have heard it named and we all admit that it is our ambition to achieve it, for we do not take pleasure simply in the sound of the word. When a Greek hears it named in Latin, he derives no pleasure from it because he does not know what has been said. But we get pleasure from it, just as he would if he heard it spoken in Greek. This is because happiness is neither Greek nor Latin, but we are all eager to achieve it, whether we speak Greek or Latin or any other language. It must, then, be known to all, and there can be no doubt that if it were possible to put the question in a common language and ask all men whether they wished to be happy, all would reply that they did. But this could only happen if happiness itself, that is, the state which the word signifies, were to be found somewhere in their memories.

21

But is it to be found in the memory in the same way as Carthage, which I have seen, is present in my memory? This cannot be the case, because happiness cannot be seen by the eye, since it is not a material object. Is it in the memory in the same way as we remember numbers? Again this cannot be the case, because once we have the knowledge of numbers we cease trying to acquire it; but even though we have knowledge of happiness, and love it for that reason, we continue to wish to achieve it, so that we may be happy. Is it then in the memory in the same way as the art of public speaking is there? Here again the answer is no. People recognize what is meant by the word 'eloquence' even though they have not mastered the art themselves, and many of them would like to be eloquent. This shows that they have knowledge of what it is. But by means of their bodily senses they have been made aware of eloquence in others. It has given them pleasure and they desire the gift for themselves. Of course they would get no pleasure from it unless they had some deeper knowledge of it, and they would not wish to have it for themselves unless they enjoyed it. But in the case of happiness there is no bodily sense by which we can experience it in others.

Perhaps it is in the memory in the same way as we remember joy. Even when I am sad I can remember joy, just as I can visualize happiness when I am unhappy. Yet I have never been aware of joy through any of the bodily senses. I have not seen or heard it, smelled, tasted

or touched it. It is something that I have experienced in my mind on occasions of joy, and the knowledge of it has remained firmly in my memory, so that I can always recall it, sometimes with disgust and sometimes with longing, according to the differences between the things which I remember having enjoyed. For I have at times taken great joy in shameful things, and when I remember them now, I loathe and detest them. At other times I have enjoyed good and honourable things and I remember them with longing, although they may now be beyond my reach, so that the remembrance of past joy makes me sad.

Where and when, therefore, did I experience a state of blessed happiness, so that I am enabled to remember it and love it and long for it? I am not alone in this desire, nor are there only a few who share it with me: without exception we all long for happiness. Unless we had some sure knowledge of it, we should not desire it with such certainty. But if two men were asked whether they wanted to serve in the army, one might reply that he did and the other that he did not. If, on the other hand, they were asked whether they wanted to be happy, they would both reply at once and without hesitation that they did. The only reason why one of them should wish to serve in the army and the other not to serve would be that they wanted to be happy. Is it that different persons find joy in different things? All agree that they want to be happy, just as, if they were asked, they would all agree that they desired joy. In fact they think that joy is the same as happiness. They may all search for it in different ways, but all try their hardest to reach the same goal, that is, joy. No one can say that he has no experience of joy, and this is why he finds it in his memory and recognizes it when he hears the phrase 'a state of happiness'.

22

O Lord, far be it from the heart of your servant who confesses to you, far be it from me to think that whatever joy I feel makes me truly happy. For there is a joy that is not given to those who do not love you, but only to those who love you for your own sake. You yourself are their joy. Happiness is to rejoice in you and for you and because of you. This is true happiness and there is no other. Those who think that there is another kind of happiness look for joy else-

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where, but theirs is not true joy. Yet their minds are set upon something akin to joy.

23

We cannot therefore be certain that all men desire true happiness, because there are some who do not look for joy in you; and since to rejoice in you is the only true happiness, we must conclude that they do not desire true happiness. It may be that all men do desire to be happy, but because *the impulses of nature and the impulses of the spirit are at war with one another*, so that *they cannot do all that their will approves*,¹ they fall back upon what they are able to do and find contentment in this way. For their will to do what they cannot do is not strong enough to enable them to do it. If I ask them whether they prefer truth or falsehood as the foundation of their joy, they all reply that they would choose truth, and they say this as unhesitatingly as they say that they wish to be happy. True happiness is to rejoice in the truth, for to rejoice in the truth is to rejoice in you, O God, who are the Truth, you, my God, my true Light, to whom I look for salvation. This is the happiness that all desire. All desire this, the only true state of happiness. All desire to rejoice in truth. I have known many men who wished to deceive, but none who wished to be deceived. Where did they learn the meaning of happiness unless it was where they learned the meaning of truth? For they love truth, since they do not like to be deceived, and when they love happiness – which is the same as to rejoice in truth – they must love truth also. But they could not love it unless they had some knowledge of it in their memory. Why, then, do they not take joy in it? Why are they not happy? It is because they attend far more closely to other things whose power to make them unhappy is greater than the power of their dim memory of truth to make them happy. There is still a faint glow of light in man.² Let him walk on, for fear that darkness may engulf him.

But why does truth engender hatred? Why does your servant meet with hostility when he preaches the truth, although men love happiness, which is simply the enjoyment of truth? It can only be that man's love of truth is such that when he loves something which is not the truth, he pretends to himself that what he loves is the truth, and because he hates to be proved wrong, he will not allow himself

¹ Gal. 5: 17. ² See John 12: 35.

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to be convinced that he is deceiving himself. So he hates the real truth for the sake of what he takes to his heart in its place. Men love the truth when it bathes them in its light: they hate it when it proves them wrong. Because they hate to be deceived themselves, but are glad if they can deceive others, they love the truth when it is revealed to them but hate it when it reveals that they are wrong. They reap their just reward, for those who do not wish to stand condemned by the truth find themselves unmasked against their will and also find that truth is denied to them. This is precisely the behaviour of the human mind. In its blind inertia, in its abject shame, it loves to lie concealed, yet it wishes that nothing should be concealed from it. Its reward is just the opposite of its desire, for it cannot conceal itself from the truth, but truth remains hidden from it. Yet even in this wretched state it would still rather find joy in truth than in falsehood. One day, then, it shall be happy, if it learns to ignore all that distracts it and to rejoice in truth, the sole Truth by which all else is true.

24

See how I have explored the vast field of my memory in search of you, O Lord! And I have not found you outside it. For I have discovered nothing about you except what I have remembered since the time when I first learned about you. Ever since then I have not forgotten you. For I found my God, who is Truth itself, where I found truth, and ever since I learned the truth I have not forgotten it. So, since the time when I first learned of you, you have always been present in my memory, and it is there that I find you whenever I am reminded of you and find delight in you. This is my holy joy, which in your mercy you have given me, heedful of my poverty.

25

But in which part of my memory are you present, O Lord? What cell have you constructed for yourself in my memory? What sanctuary have you built there for yourself? That you should be present in it is a great honour, but I must now ask myself in what part of it you are present. When I remind myself of you I go beyond those functions of the memory which I share with the beasts, for I did not find

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you amongst the images of material things. I went on to search for you in the part of my memory where the emotions of my mind are stored, but here too I did not find you. I passed on to the seat of the mind itself – for this too is in the memory, since the mind can remember itself – but you were not there. For you are not the image of a material body, nor are you an emotion such as is felt by living men when they are glad or sorry, when they have sensations of desire or fear, when they remember or forget, or when they experience any other feeling. In the same way you are not the mind itself, for you are the Lord God of the mind. All these things are subject to change, but you remain supreme over all things, immutable. And yet you have deigned to be present in my memory ever since I first learned of you. Why do I ask what place is set aside in my memory as your dwelling, as if there were distinctions of place in the memory? Truly you do dwell in it, because I remember you ever since I first came to learn of you, and it is there that I find you when I am reminded of you.

26

Where, then, did I find you so that I could learn of you? For you were not in my memory before I learned of you. Where else, then, did I find you, to learn of you, unless it was in yourself, above me? Whether we approach you or depart from you, you are not confined in any place. You are Truth, and you are everywhere present where all seek counsel of you. You reply to all at once, though the counsel each seeks is different. The answer you give is clear, but not all hear it clearly. All ask you whatever they wish to ask, but the answer they receive is not always what they want to hear. The man who serves you best is the one who is less intent on hearing from you what he wills to hear than on shaping his will according to what he hears from you.

27

I have learnt to love you late, Beauty at once so ancient and so new! I have learnt to love you late! You were within me, and I was in the world outside myself. I searched for you outside myself and, disfigured as I was, I fell upon the lovely things of your creation. You were with me, but I was not with you. The beautiful things of this

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world kept me far from you and yet, if they had not been in you, they would have had no being at all. You called me; you cried aloud to me; you broke my barrier of deafness. You shone upon me; your radiance enveloped me; you put my blindness to flight. You shed your fragrance about me; I drew breath and now I gasp for your sweet odour. I tasted you, and now I hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am inflamed with love of your peace.

28

When at last I cling to you with all my being, for me there will be no more sorrow, no more toil. Then at last I shall be alive with true life, for my life will be wholly filled by you. You raise up and sustain all whose lives you fill, but my life is not yet filled by you and I am a burden to myself. The pleasures I find in the world, which should be cause for tears, are at strife with its sorrows, in which I should rejoice, and I cannot tell to which the victory will fall. Have pity on me, O Lord, in my misery! My sorrows are evil and they are at strife with joys that are good, and I cannot tell which will gain the victory. Have pity on me, O Lord, in my misery! I do not hide my wounds from you. I am sick, and you are the physician. You are merciful: I have need of your mercy. Is not our life on earth a period of trial? For who would wish for hardship and difficulty? You command us to endure these troubles, not to love them. No one loves what he endures, even though he may be glad to endure it. For though he may rejoice in his power of endurance, he would prefer that there should be nothing for him to endure. When I am in trouble I long for good fortune, but when I have good fortune I fear to lose it. Is there any middle state between prosperity and adversity, some state in which human life is not a trial? In prosperity as the world knows it there is twofold cause for grief, for there is grief in the fear of adversity and grief in joy that does not last. And in what the world knows as adversity the causes of grief are threefold, for not only is it hard to bear, but it also causes us to long for prosperous times and to fear that our powers of endurance may break. Is not man's life on earth a long, unbroken period of trial?

29

There can be no hope for me except in your great mercy. Give me the grace to do as you command, and command me to do what you will! You command us to control our bodily desires. And, as we are told, when I knew that no man can *be master of himself, except of God's bounty, I was wise enough already to know whence the gift came.*¹ Truly it is by continence that we are made as one and regain that unity of self which we lost by falling apart in the search for a variety of pleasures. For a man loves you so much the less if, besides you, he also loves something else which he does not love for your sake. O Love ever burning, never quenched! O Charity, my God, set me on fire with your love! You command me to be continent. Give me the grace to do as you command, and command me to do what you will!

30

It is truly your command that I should be continent and restrain myself from *gratification of corrupt nature, gratification of the eye, the empty pomp of living.*² You commanded me not to commit fornication, and though you did not forbid me to marry, you counselled me to take a better course. You gave me the grace and I did your bidding, even before I became a minister of your sacrament. But in my memory, of which I have said much, the images of things imprinted upon it by my former habits still linger on. When I am awake they obtrude themselves upon me, though with little strength. But when I dream, they not only give me pleasure but are very much like acquiescence in the act. The power which these illusory images have over my soul and my body is so great that what is no more than a vision can influence me in sleep in a way that the reality cannot do when I am awake. Surely it cannot be that when I am asleep I am not myself, O Lord my God? And yet the moment when I pass from wakefulness to sleep, or return again from sleep to wakefulness, marks a great difference in me. During sleep where is my reason which, when I am awake, resists such suggestions and remains firm and undismayed even in face of the realities themselves? Is it sealed off when I close my eyes? Does it fall asleep with the senses of the

¹ Wisdom 8: 21. ² 1 John 2: 16.

body? And why is it that even in sleep I often resist the attractions of these images, for I remember my chaste resolutions and abide by them and give no consent to temptations of this sort? Yet the difference between waking and sleeping is so great that even when, during sleep, it happens otherwise, I return to a clear conscience when I wake and realize that, because of this difference, I was not responsible for the act, although I am sorry that by some means or other it happened to me.

The power of your hand, O God Almighty, is indeed great enough to cure all the diseases of my soul. By granting me more abundant grace you can even quench the fire of sensuality which provokes me in my sleep. More and more, O Lord, you will increase your gifts in me, so that my soul may follow me to you, freed from the concupiscence which binds it, and rebel no more against itself. By your grace it will no longer commit in sleep these shameful, unclean acts inspired by sensual images, which lead to the pollution of the body: it will not so much as consent to them. For to you, the Almighty, who are *powerful enough to carry out your purpose beyond all our hopes and dreams*,¹ it is no great task to prescribe that no temptations of this kind, even such slight temptations as can be checked by the least act of will, should arouse pleasure in me, even in sleep, provided that my dispositions are chaste. This you can do for me at any time of life, even in the prime of manhood. But now I make this confession to my good Lord, declaring how I am still troubled by this kind of evil. *With awe in my heart I rejoice*² in your gifts, yet I grieve for my deficiencies, trusting that you will perfect your mercies in me until I reach the fullness of peace, which I shall enjoy with you in soul and body, when *death is swallowed up in victory*.³

31

There is another evil which we meet with day by day. If only it were the only one! For we repair the daily wastage of our bodies by eating and drinking, until the time comes when you *will bring both food and our animal nature to an end*.⁴ When that time comes, your wonderful fullness will spell the end of our need, and you will *clothe this corruptible nature of ours with incorruptible life*.⁵ But for the

¹ Eph. 3: 20. ² Ps. 2: 11. ³ 1 Cor. 15: 54. ⁴ 1 Cor. 6: 13. ⁵ 1 Cor. 15: 53.

present I find pleasure in this need, though I fight against it, for fear of becoming its captive. Every day I wage war upon it by fasting. Time and again I force my body to obey me, but the pain which this causes me is cancelled by the pleasure of eating and drinking. For of course hunger and thirst are painful. Like a fever they parch and kill unless they are relieved by the remedies of food and drink. And since, to console us, we have your gifts – for you have given us earth and water and sky to serve us in our weakness – the remedies are there for us to find and we think of this hardship as a source of delight.

Because you have taught me to understand this, I look upon food as a medicine. But the snare of concupiscence awaits me in the very process of passing from the discomfort of hunger to the contentment which comes when it is satisfied. For the process itself is a pleasure and there is no other means of satisfying hunger except the one which we are obliged to take. And although the purpose of eating and drinking is to preserve health, in its train there follows an ominous kind of enjoyment, which often tries to outstrip it, so that it is really for the sake of pleasure that I do what I claim to do and mean to do for the sake of my health. Moreover, health and enjoyment have not the same requirements, for what is sufficient for health is not enough for enjoyment, and it is often hard to tell whether the body, which must be cared for, requires further nourishment, or whether we are being deceived by the allurements of greed demanding to be gratified. My unhappy soul welcomes this uncertainty, using it to vindicate and excuse itself. It is glad that the proper requirements of health are in doubt, so that under the pretence of caring for health it may disguise the pursuit of pleasure.

Every day I try my hardest to resist these temptations. I call for your helping hand and tell you of my difficulties, because this is a problem which I have not yet resolved. I hear the voice of my God who commands us: *Do not let your hearts grow dull with revelry and drunkenness*.¹ Drunkenness is far from me. By your grace may you prevent it from coming near! But there have been times when over-eating has stolen upon your servant. By your mercy may you keep it far from me! For no man *can be master of himself, except of God's bounty*.²

¹ Luke 21: 34. ² Wisdom 8: 21.

You grant us many gifts when we pray for them. And even before we pray for them, all the good things that we have ever received have come from you. That we should later recognize that they came from you is also your gift. I have never been a drunkard myself, but I have known drunkards made sober by you. Therefore, just as it is by your doing that men who were once drunkards are not so for ever, it is also by your doing that those who were never drunkards are not drunkards now. And in the same way it is also by your doing that men of both sorts know that it was you who did this for them.

I have also heard these other words of yours: *Do not follow the counsel of appetite. Turn your back on your own liking.*¹ By your gift I have also heard and found great comfort in the words: *We gain nothing by eating, lose nothing by abstaining.*² This means that eating will not bring me plenty nor abstinence reduce me to misery. I have heard these words too: *I have learned to be content with my circumstances as they are. I know what it is to have abundant means and what it is to live in want. Nothing is beyond my powers, thanks to the strength God gives me.*³ Here speaks a true soldier of the heavenly army, not mere dust like the rest of us! But remember, O Lord, that we are dust. Remember that you made man from dust, and that he was lost and found again. My heart goes out to Paul for the words that he wrote by your inspiration: *Nothing is beyond my powers, thanks to the strength God gives me.*³ But he too was dust and could not do all things by his own power. Give me strength, O Lord, so that I may do all things. Give me the grace to do as you command, and command me to do what you will! Paul acknowledges your gifts and the boast that he makes is made in the Lord.⁴ I have also heard another of your servants begging for your gifts in these words: *Let the itch of gluttony pass me by.*⁵ All this makes it clear, O holy God, that when your commands are obeyed, it is from you that we receive the power to obey them.

Good Father, you have taught me that nothing can be unclean for those who have clean hearts,⁶ yet it goes ill with the man who eats to the hurt of his own conscience.⁷ You have taught me that all is good that God has made, nothing is to be rejected; only we must be thankful to him when we partake of it;⁸ that it is not what we eat that gives us our standing in God's sight;⁹ that no one must be allowed to take us to task over what we

¹ Ecclus. 18: 30. ² I Cor. 8: 8. ³ Philipp. 4: 11-13. ⁴ See II Cor. 10: 17.
⁵ Ecclus. 23: 6. ⁶ Tit. 1: 15. ⁷ Rom. 14: 20. ⁸ I Tim. 4: 4. ⁹ I Cor. 8: 8.

eat or drink;¹ and that no man, over his meat, should mock at him who does not eat it, nor, while he abstains, pass judgement on him who eats it.² For these lessons which I have learnt all praise and all thanks be to you, my God, my Master, to you who knock at the door of my ears and shed your light over my heart! Deliver me from all temptation. It is the uncleanness of gluttony that I fear, not unclean meat. For I know that Noe was allowed to eat all kinds of meat that were suitable as food; that Elias was fed on meat; and that John the Baptist, remarkable ascetic though he was, was not polluted by the flesh of living creatures, the locusts which were granted him as food. On the other hand I know that Esau was defrauded by his greed for a dish of lentils; that David reproached himself for longing for a drink of water; and that Christ our King was tempted not by meat but by bread. And the Israelites in the desert deserved rebuke, not because they wanted meat, but because in their greed for food they sulked and grumbled against the Lord.

In the midst of these temptations I struggle daily against greed for food and drink. This is not an evil which I can decide once and for all to repudiate and never to embrace again, as I was able to do in the case of fornication. I must therefore hold back my appetite with neither too firm nor too slack a rein. But is there anyone, O Lord, who is never enticed a little beyond the strict limit of need? If there is such a one, he is a great man. Let him praise your name. But I am not such a man: I am a poor sinner. Yet I too praise your name, and Christ, who conquered the world, pleads with you for my sins. He numbers me among the weak members of his Body, for your eyes looked upon me, when I was yet unformed; all human lives are already written in your record.³

32

The sense of smell does not trouble me greatly with its attractions. I do not miss sweet scents when they are absent, but neither do I refuse them where I find them. I am even ready to do without them altogether. This, at least, is my own opinion of myself, but I may be wrong. For the powers of my inner self are veiled in darkness which I must deplore. When my mind speculates upon its own capabilities, it realizes that it cannot safely trust its own judgement, because its

¹ Col. 2: 16. ² Rom. 14: 3. ³ Ps. 138: 16 (139: 16).

inner workings are generally so obscure that they are only revealed in the light of experience; and, besides this, during this life, which may be called a perpetual trial, no one should be confident that although he has been able to pass from a worse state to a better, he may not also pass from a better state to a worse. Our only hope, our only confidence, the only firm promise that we have is your mercy.

33

I used to be much more fascinated by the pleasures of sound than the pleasures of smell. I was enthralled by them, but you broke my bonds and set me free. I admit that I still find some enjoyment in the music of hymns, which are alive with your praises, when I hear them sung by well-trained, melodious voices. But I do not enjoy it so much that I cannot tear myself away. I can leave it when I wish. But if I am not to turn a deaf ear to music, which is the setting for the words which give it life, I must allow it a position of some honour in my heart, and I find it difficult to assign it to its proper place. For sometimes I feel that I treat it with more honour than it deserves. I realize that when they are sung these sacred words stir my mind to greater religious fervour and kindle in me a more ardent flame of piety than they would if they were not sung; and I also know that there are particular modes in song and in the voice, corresponding to my various emotions and able to stimulate them because of some mysterious relationship between the two. But I ought not to allow my mind to be paralysed by the gratification of my senses, which often leads it astray. For the senses are not content to take second place. Simply because I allow them their due, as adjuncts to reason, they attempt to take precedence and forge ahead of it, with the result that I sometimes sin in this way but am not aware of it until later.

Sometimes, too, from over-anxiety to avoid this particular trap I make the mistake of being too strict. When this happens, I have no wish but to exclude from my ears, and from the ears of the Church as well, all the melody of those lovely chants to which the Psalms of David are habitually sung; and it seems safer to me to follow the precepts which I remember often having heard ascribed to Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, who used to oblige the lectors to recite the psalms with such slight modulation of the voice that they seemed

to be speaking rather than chanting. But when I remember the tears that I shed on hearing the songs of the Church in the early days, soon after I had recovered my faith, and when I realize that nowadays it is not the singing that moves me but the meaning of the words when they are sung in a clear voice to the most appropriate tune, I again acknowledge the great value of this practice. So I waver between the danger that lies in gratifying the senses and the benefits which, as I know from experience, can accrue from singing. Without committing myself to an irrevocable opinion, I am inclined to approve of the custom of singing in church, in order that by indulging the ears weaker spirits may be inspired with feelings of devotion. Yet when I find the singing itself more moving than the truth which it conveys, I confess that this is a grievous sin, and at those times I would prefer not to hear the singer.

This, then, is my present state. Let those of my readers whose hearts are filled with charity, from which good actions spring, weep with me and weep for me. Those who feel no charity in themselves will not be moved by my words. But I beg you, O Lord my God, to look upon me and listen to me. Have pity on me and heal me, for you see that I have become a problem to myself, and this is the ailment from which I suffer.

34

Finally I must confess how I am tempted through the eye. Let the ears of your Church, the ears of my devout brothers in Christ, listen to my words, so that I may bring to an end my discussion of the body's temptations to pleasure, which still provoke me as *I sigh, longing for the shelter of that home which heaven will give me.*¹

The eyes delight in beautiful shapes of different sorts and bright and attractive colours. I would not have these things take possession of my soul. Let God possess it, he who made them all. He made them all *very good,*² but it is he who is my Good, not they. All day and every day, while I am awake, they are there before my eyes. They allow me no respite such as I am granted in moments of silence when there is no singing and sometimes no sound at all to be heard. For light, the queen of colours, pervades all that I see, wherever I am throughout the day, and by the ever-changing pattern of its rays it entices me

¹ II Cor. 5: 2. ² Gen. 1: 31.

even when I am occupied with something else and take no special note of it. It wins so firm a hold on me that, if I am suddenly deprived of it, I long to have it back, and if I am left for long without it, I grow dispirited.

But the true Light is the Light which Tobias saw when, though his eyes were blind, he taught his son the path he should follow in life, and himself led the way, charity guiding his steps so that he did not stray. It is the Light which Isaac saw when the sight of his eyes was dimmed and clouded by old age and it was granted to him, not to bless his sons in full knowledge as to which was which, but to know them by blessing them. It is the Light which Jacob saw when, though his eyes were blinded by old age, a Light shone in his heart and cast its beams over the tribes of Israel yet to come, as he foresaw them in the persons of his sons. It is the Light which he saw when he laid his hands on his grandchildren, the sons of Joseph, not in the way that their father, who saw only the outward act, tried to make him do it, but mystically crossed, in the way that he discerned by the Light that shone within him. This is the true Light. It is one alone and all who see and love it are one.

But in our life in the world this earthly light, of which I was speaking, is a seasoning, sweet and tempting, but dangerous for those whose love for it is blind. Yet those who have learnt to praise you for this as well as for your other gifts, O God, *Maker of all things*,¹ sing you a hymn of praise for it: they are not beguiled by it in their dreams. For myself, I wish to be as they are. I resist the allurements of the eye for fear that as I walk upon your path, my feet may be caught in a trap. Instead, I raise the eyes of my spirit to you, so that you may *save my feet from the snare*.² Time and again you save them, for I fail to escape the trap. You never cease to free me, although again and again I find myself caught in the snares that are laid all about me. For you are *the guardian of Israel, one who is never weary, never sleeps*.³

By every kind of art and the skill of their hands men make innumerable things – clothes, shoes, pottery, and other useful objects, besides pictures and various works which are the fruit of their imagination. They make them on a far more lavish scale than is required to satisfy their own modest needs or to express their devotion, and all

¹ Saint Ambrose's 'Evening Hymn'; see Book IX, chapter 12.

² Ps. 24: 15 (25: 15). ³ Ps. 120: 4 (121: 4).

these things are additional temptations to the eye, made by men who love the worldly things they make themselves but forget their own Maker and destroy what he made in them. But, O my God, my Glory, for these things too I offer you a hymn of thanksgiving. I make a sacrifice of praise to him who sanctifies me, for the beauty which flows through men's minds into their skilful hands comes from that Beauty which is above their souls and for which my soul sighs all day and night. And it is from this same supreme Beauty that men who make things of beauty and love it in its outward forms derive the principle by which they judge it: but they do not accept the same principle to guide them in the use they make of it. Yet it is there, and they do not see it. If only they could see it, they would not depart from it. They would preserve their strength for you,¹ not squander it on luxuries that make them weary.

Though I say this and see that it is true, my feet are still caught in the toils of this world's beauty. But you will free me, O Lord; I know that you will free me. For *ever I keep your mercies in mind*.² I am caught and need your mercy, and by your mercy you will save me from the snare. Sometimes, if I have not fallen deep into the trap, I shall feel nothing when you rescue me; but at other times, when I am fast ensnared, I shall suffer the pain of it.

35

I must now speak of a different kind of temptation, more dangerous than these because it is more complicated. For in addition to our bodily appetites, which make us long to gratify all our senses and our pleasures and lead to our ruin if we stay away from you by becoming their slaves, the mind is also subject to a certain propensity to use the sense of the body, not for self-indulgence of a physical kind, but for the satisfaction of its own inquisitiveness. This futile curiosity masquerades under the name of science and learning, and since it derives from our thirst for knowledge and sight is the principal sense by which knowledge is acquired, in the Scriptures it is called *gratification of the eye*.³ For although, correctly speaking, to see is the proper function of the eyes, we use the word of the other senses too, when we employ them to acquire knowledge. We do not say 'Hear how it

¹ See Ps. 58: 10 (59: 9). ² Ps. 25: 3 (26: 3). ³ 1 John 2: 16.

glows', 'Smell how bright it is', 'Taste how it shines', or 'Feel how it glitters', because these are all things which we say that we see. Yet we not only say 'See how it shines' when we are speaking of something which only the eyes can perceive, but we also say 'See how loud it is', 'See how it smells', 'See how it tastes', and 'See how hard it is'. So, as I said, sense-experience in general is called the lust of the eyes because, although the function of sight belongs primarily to the eyes, we apply it to the other organs of sense as well, by analogy, when they are used to discover any item of knowledge.

We can easily distinguish between the motives of pleasure and curiosity. When the senses demand pleasure, they look for objects of visual beauty, harmonious sounds, fragrant perfumes, and things that are pleasant to the taste or soft to the touch. But when their motive is curiosity, they may look for just the reverse of these things, simply to put it to the proof, not for the sake of an unpleasant experience, but from a relish for investigation and discovery. What pleasure can there be in the sight of a mangled corpse, which can only horrify? Yet people will flock to see one lying on the ground, simply for the sensation of sorrow and horror that it gives them. They are even afraid that it may bring them nightmares, as though it were something that they had been forced to look at while they were awake or something to which they had been attracted by rumours of its beauty. The same is true of the other senses, although it would be tedious to give further examples. It is to satisfy this unhealthy curiosity that freaks and prodigies are put on show in the theatre, and for the same reason men are led to investigate the secrets of nature, which are irrelevant to our lives, although such knowledge is of no value to them and they wish to gain it merely for the sake of knowing. It is curiosity, too, which causes men to turn to sorcery in the effort to obtain knowledge for the same perverted purpose. And it even invades our religion, for we put God to the test when we demand signs and wonders from him, not in the hope of salvation, but simply for the love of the experience.

In this immense forest, so full of snares and dangers, I have pared away many sins and thrust them from my heart, for you have given me the grace to do this, O God, my Saviour. But as long as my daily life is passed in the midst of the clamour raised by so many temptations of this sort, when can I presume to say that nothing of this kind

can hold my attention or tempt me into idle speculation? It is true that the theatres no longer attract me; the study of astrology does not interest me; I have never dealt in necromancy; and I detest all sacrilegious rites. But how often has not the enemy used his wiles upon me to suggest that I should ask for some sign from you, O Lord my God, to whom I owe my humble, undivided service? I beseech you, by Christ our King and by Jerusalem the chaste, our only homeland, that just as I now withhold my consent from these suggestions, I may always continue to ward them off and keep them still farther from me. But when I pray to you for the salvation of another, the purpose and intention of my prayer is far different. For you do what you will and you grant me, as you always will, the grace to follow you gladly.

Yet who can tell how many times each day our curiosity is tempted by the most trivial and insignificant matters? Who can tell how often we give way? So often it happens that, when others tell foolish tales, at first we bear with them for fear of offending the weak, and then little by little we begin to listen willingly. I no longer go to watch a dog chasing a hare at the games in the circus. But if I should happen to see the same thing in the country as I pass by, the chase might easily hold my attention and distract me from whatever serious thoughts occupied my mind. It might not actually compel me to turn my horse from the path, but such would be the inclination of my heart; and unless you made me realize my weakness and quickly reminded me, either to turn my eyes from the sight and raise my thoughts to you in contemplation, or to despise it utterly and continue on my way, I should simply stop and gloat. What excuse can I make for myself when often, as I sit at home, I cannot turn my eyes from the sight of a lizard catching flies or a spider entangling them as they fly into her web? Does it make any difference that these are only small animals? It is true that the sight of them inspires me to praise you for the wonders of your creation and the order in which you have disposed all things, but I am not intent upon your praises when I first begin to watch. It is one thing to rise quickly from a fall, another not to fall at all.

My life is full of such faults, and my only hope is in your boundless mercy. For when our hearts become repositories piled high with such worthless stock as this, it is the cause of interruption and

distraction from our prayers. And although, in your presence, the voices of our hearts are raised to your ear, all kinds of trivial thoughts break in and cut us off from the great act of prayer.

36

Must I not consider this too as one of the faults which I ought to despise? Can anything restore me to hope except your mercy? That you are merciful I know, for you have begun to change me. You know how great a change you have worked in me, for first of all you have cured me of the desire to assert my claim to liberty, so that you may also pardon me all my other sins, *heal all my mortal ills, rescue my life from deadly peril, crown me with the blessings of your mercy, content all my desire for good.*¹ You know how great a change you have worked in me, for you have curbed my pride by teaching me to fear you and you have tamed my neck to your yoke. And now that I bear your yoke, I find its burden light, for this was your promise and you have kept your word. In truth, though I did not know it, it was light even in the days when I was afraid to bend my neck to it.

But, O Lord, you who alone rule without pride since you are the only true Lord and no other lord rules over you, there is a third kind of temptation which, I fear, has not passed from me. Can it ever pass from me in all this life? It is the desire to be feared or loved by other men, simply for the pleasure that it gives me, though in such pleasure there is no true joy. It means only a life of misery and despicable vainglory. It is for this reason more than any other that men neither love you nor fear you in purity of heart. It is for this reason that *you thwart the proud and keep your grace for the humble.*² This is why, with a voice of thunder, you condemn the ambitions of this world, so that *the very foundations of the hills quail, and quake.*³ This is why the enemy of our true happiness persists in his attacks upon me, for he knows that when men hold certain offices in human society, it is necessary that they should be loved and feared by other men. He sets his traps about me, baiting them with tributes of applause, in the hope that in my eagerness to listen I may be caught off my guard. He wants me to divorce my joy from the truth and place it in man's duplicity. He wants me to enjoy being loved and

¹ Ps. 102: 3-5 (103: 3-5). ² I Pet. 5: 5. ³ Ps. 17: 8 (18: 7).

feared by others, not for your sake, but in your place, so that in this way he may make me like himself and keep me to share with him, not the true fellowship of charity, but the bonds of common punishment. For he determined to set his throne in the north,¹ where, chilled and benighted, men might serve him as he imitates you in his perverse, distorted way.

But we, O Lord, are your *little flock.*² Keep us as your own. Spread your wings and let us shelter beneath them. Let us glory in you alone. If we are loved or feared by others, let it be for your sake. No man who seeks the praise of other men can be defended by men when you call him to account. Men cannot save him when you condemn. But it happens too, not that praise is given to the man who is *proud of his wicked end achieved*³ or that the evildoer wins applause, but that a man is praised for some gift which you have given him. And if he takes greater joy in the praise which he receives than in the possession of the gift for which men praise him, then the price he pays for their applause is the loss of your favour and he, the receiver of praise, is worse off than the giver. For the one finds pleasure in God's gift in man, while the other finds less pleasure in God's gift than in the gift of men.

37

Day after day without ceasing these temptations put us to the test, O Lord. The human tongue is a furnace in which the temper of our souls is daily tried. And in this matter too you command us to be continent. Give me the grace to do as you command, and command me to do what you will! You know how I have cried to you from the depths of my heart, and how I have wept floods of tears because of this difficulty. For I cannot easily deduce how far I am cured of this disease, and I have great fear of offending you unawares by sins to which I am blind, though to your eyes they are manifest. In other kinds of temptation I have some means of examining myself, but in this I have almost none. For I can see what progress I have made in the ability to restrain my mind from giving in to sensual pleasures or idle curiosity. It becomes plain when I do without these things, either voluntarily or for lack of the occasion, because I then ask myself how much, or how little, it troubles me to be without

¹ The allusion is to Is. 14: 13, 14. ² Luke 12: 32. ³ Ps. 9: 24 (10: 3).

them. The same is true of wealth, which men grasp because they want the means of satisfying one or another of these three kinds of temptation, or perhaps two or even all three of them. If the soul, when it has riches, cannot tell whether it despises them, it can put itself to the proof by discarding them. But if we are to do without praise in order to test our powers, are we to live such outrageously wicked and abandoned lives that all who know us will detest us? Is it possible to imagine a more insane proposal than this? If praise is normally associated with a good life and good works, and rightly so, we ought neither to cease living good lives nor to abandon the rightful consequence. But I cannot tell whether or not I have the forbearance to do without anything, unless it is taken away from me.

What, then, is my attitude to temptation of this kind? What am I to confess to you, O Lord? I can only say that I am gratified by praise, but less by praise than by the truth. For if I were asked whether I would prefer to be commended by all my fellow men for wild delusions and errors on all counts, or to be stigmatized by them for constancy and assurance in the truth, it is clear which I would choose. But I wish that words of praise from other men did not increase the joy I feel for any good qualities that I may have. Yet I confess that it does increase my joy. What is more, their censure detracts from it. And when I am worried by this wretched failing, an excuse occurs to me, though how good an excuse it is only you know, O God: it leaves me in doubt. For you have commanded us not only to be continent, but also to be just; that is, to withhold our love from certain things and to bestow it on others. You want us not only to love you, but also to love our neighbour. For this reason I tell myself that when I am gratified by the praise of a man who well understands what it is that he praises, the true reason for my pleasure is that my neighbour has made good progress and shows promise for the future. Similarly, when I hear him cast a slur upon something which he does not understand or something which in fact is good, I am sorry that he should have this failing. I am sometimes sorry, too, to hear my own praises, either when others commend me for qualities which I am not glad to possess, or when they value in me, more highly than their due, qualities which may be good, but are of little importance. But here again I cannot tell whether this feeling comes from reluctance to allow the man who praises me to disagree with me about

my own qualities, not because I am concerned for his welfare, but because the good qualities which please me in myself please me still more when they please others as well. For in a certain sense it is no compliment to me when my own opinion of myself is not upheld, in other words either when qualities which displease me are commended, or when those which please me least are most applauded.

Am I not right, then, to say that I am in doubt about this problem? My God, in the light of your truth I see that if my feelings are stirred by the praise which I receive, it should not be for my own sake but for the good of my neighbour. But whether this is so with me I do not know, for in this matter I know less about myself than I know of you. I beg you, my God, to reveal me to my own eyes, so that I may confess to my brothers in Christ what wounds I find in myself, for they will pray for me. Let me examine myself again, more closely. If it is the good of my neighbour that touches my heart when I hear my own praises, why am I less aggrieved when blame is unjustly laid at another's door than when it is laid at mine? Why do insults sting me more when they are offered to me than when I hear them offered to others with equal injustice? Can I plead ignorance in this case too? Or is the truth of the matter that I deceive myself and that in heart and tongue alike I am guilty of falsehood in your presence? O Lord, keep such folly far from me, for fear that my lips should sin, *sleeking my head with the oil of their flattery*.¹

I am poor and needy and I am better only when in sorrow of heart I detest myself and seek your mercy, until what is faulty in me is repaired and made whole and finally I come to that state of peace which the eye of the proud cannot see. Yet in what others say about us and in what they know of our deeds there is grave danger of temptation. For our love of praise leads us to court the good opinion of others and hoard it for our personal glorification. And even when I reproach myself for it, the love of praise tempts me. There is temptation in the very process of self-reproach, for often, by priding himself on his contempt for vainglory, a man is guilty of even emptier pride; and for this reason his contempt of vainglory is an empty

¹ Ps. 140: 5 (141: 5).

boast, because he cannot really hold it in contempt as long as he prides himself on doing so.

39

Deep in our inner selves there is another evil, the outcome of the same kind of temptation. This is self-complacency, the vanity of those who are pleased with themselves, although they either fail to please others or have no wish to do so and even actively displease them. But though they are pleasing to themselves, they are gravely displeasing to you, because they congratulate themselves not only upon qualities which are not good, as though they were good, but also upon good qualities received from you, as though they were their own gifts to themselves; or else they recognize them as yours, but claim them for their own merits; or, again, they know that they have received them by your grace alone, but still they grudge your grace to others and will not rejoice in it with them.

You see how my heart trembles and strains in the midst of all these perils and others of a like kind. It is not as though I do not suffer wounds, but I feel rather that you heal them over and over again.

40

You have walked everywhere at my side, O Truth, teaching me what to seek and what to avoid, whenever I laid before you the things that I was able to see in this world below and asked you to counsel me. As far as my senses enabled me to do so, I surveyed the world about me and explored both the life which my body has from me and the senses themselves. Next I probed the depths of my memory, so vast in its ramifications and filled in so wonderful a way with riches beyond number. I scrutinized all these things and stood back in awe, for without you I could see none of them, and I found that none of them was you. Nor was I myself the truth, I who found them, I who explored them all and tried to distinguish and appraise each according to its worth. Some of them were conveyed to me by means of my physical senses, and I subjected them to question. Others, which closely concerned my own self, I encountered in my feelings. I enumerated the various means by which their messages were brought

to me and distinguished between them. And in the great treasury of my memory there were yet other things that I examined. Some of them I returned to the keeping of my memory, others I picked out for study. But when I was doing all this, I was not myself the truth; that is, the power by which I did it was not the truth; for you, the Truth, are the unfailing Light from which I sought counsel upon all these things, asking whether they were, what they were, and how they were to be valued. But I heard you teaching me and I heard the commands you gave.

Often I do this. I find pleasure in it, and whenever I can relax from my necessary duties, I take refuge in this pleasure. But in all the regions where I thread my way, seeking your guidance, only in you do I find a safe haven for my mind, a gathering-place for my scattered parts, where no portion of me can depart from you. And sometimes you allow me to experience a feeling quite unlike my normal state, an inward sense of delight which, if it were to reach perfection in me, would be something not encountered in this life, though what it is I cannot tell. But my heavy burden of distress drags me down again to earth. Again I become a prey to my habits, which hold me fast. My tears flow, but still I am held fast. Such is the price we pay for the burden of custom! In this state I am fit to stay, unwilling though I am; in that other state, where I wish to stay, I am not fit to be. I have double cause for sorrow.

41

I have now considered the sorry state to which my sins have brought me, according to the three different forms which temptation may take, and I have invoked your helping hand to save me. For in my wounded heart I saw your splendour and it dazzled me. I asked: Who can come close to such glory? *Your watchful care has lost sight of me.*¹ You are the Truth which presides over all things. But in my selfish longing I did not wish to lose you. Together with you I wanted to possess a lie, much as a man will not utter so glaring a falsehood that it blinds his own eyes to the truth. And in this way I lost you, because you do not deign to be possessed together with a lie.

¹ Ps. 30: 23 (31: 22).

Whom could I find to reconcile me to you? Ought I to have sought the help of the angels? But if I had sought their help, what prayers should I have uttered? What rites should I have used? Many men, so I have heard, for lack of strength to return to you by themselves, have tried to do so by this means, but they ended by craving for strange visions, and their only reward was delusion. For they tried to find you in all the conceit and arrogance of their learning. They thrust out their chests in pride, when they should have beaten their breasts in mourning. And because they resembled them at heart, they attracted to their side the fallen angels, *the princes of the lower air*,¹ their companions and associates in pride. But these allies tricked them, using magic craft, for while they sought a mediator who would cleanse them of their impurities, it was no mediator that they found. It was the devil, *passing for an angel of light*,² and it was a potent lure for their proud flesh that he was not a creature of flesh and blood. For they were mortal men and sinners; but you, O Lord, to whom they wanted to be reconciled, are immortal and without sin. But a mediator between God and man must have something in common with God and something in common with man. For if in both these points he were like men, he would be far from God; and if in both of them he were like God, he would be far from men. In neither case could he be a mediator. But since, by the hidden pronouncements of your justice, you have given the devil licence to make a mockery of pride, he poses as a mediator. For in one point he is like man: he is sinful. And in the other he pretends to be like God: because he is not clothed with a mortal body of flesh and blood, he tries to represent himself as immortal. But since *sin offers death for wages*,³ in common with men he has this reason to be condemned to die.

But there is a true Mediator, whom in your secret mercy you have shown to men. You sent him so that by his example they too might learn humility. He is *the Mediator between God and men, Jesus Christ, who is a man*,⁴ and he appeared on earth between men, who are sinful

¹ Eph 2: 2. ² II Cor. 11: 14. ³ Rom. 6: 23. ⁴ I Tim. 2: 5.

and mortal, and God, who is immortal and just. Like men he was mortal: like God, he was just. And because the reward of the just is life and peace, he came so that by his own justness, which is his in union with God, he might make null the death of the wicked whom he justified, by choosing to share their death. He was made known to holy men in ancient times, so that they might be saved through faith in his passion to come, just as we are saved through faith in the passion he suffered long ago. For as man, he is our Mediator; but as the Word of God, he is not an intermediary between God and man because he is equal with God, and God with God, and together with him one God.

How great was your love for us, good Father, for *you did not even spare your own son, but gave him up*¹ to save us sinners! How great was your love for us, when it was for us that Christ, who *did not see, in the rank of Godhead, a prize to be coveted, accepted an obedience which brought him to death, death on a cross*!² He who alone was free among the dead³, for he was free to lay down his life and free to take it up again,⁴ was for us both Victor and Victim in your sight, and it was because he was the Victim that he was also the Victor. In your sight he was for us both Priest and Sacrifice, and it was because he was the Sacrifice that he was also the Priest. By being your Son, yet serving you, he freed us from servitude and made us your sons. Rightly do I place in him my firm hope that you will cure all my ills through him who *sits at your right hand and pleads for us*:⁵ otherwise I should despair. For my ills are many and great, many and great indeed; but your medicine is greater still. We might have thought that your Word was far distant from union with man, and so we might have despaired of ourselves, if he had not been *made flesh and come to dwell among us*.⁶

Terrified by my sins and the dead weight of my misery, I had turned my problems over in my mind and was half determined to seek refuge in the desert. But you forbade me to do this and gave me strength by saying: *Christ died for us all, so that being alive should no longer mean living with our own life, but with his life who died for us*.⁷ Lord, I cast all my troubles on you and from now on *I shall contemplate the wonders of your law*.⁸ You know how weak I am and how

¹ Rom. 8: 32. ² Philipp. 2: 6-8. ³ See Ps. 87: 6 (88: 5).
⁴ See John 10: 18. ⁵ Rom. 8: 34. ⁶ John 1: 14. ⁷ II Cor. 5: 15.
⁸ Ps. 118: 18 (119: 18).