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WORKS OF AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

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Confessions (Books IV-XI)



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For this space of nine years (from my nineteenth year to my eight and twentieth) we lived seduced and seducing, deceived and deceiving, in various lusts; openly, by sciences which they call liberal; secretly, with a false-named religion; here proud, there superstitious, everywhere vain. Here, hunting after the emptiness of popular praise, down even to theatrical applauses, and poetic prizes, and strifes for grassy garlands, and the follies of shows, and the intemperance of desires. There, desiring to be cleansed

from these defilements, by carrying food to those who were called “elect” and “holy,” out of which, in the workhouse of their stomachs, they should forge for us angels and gods, by whom we might be cleansed. These things did I follow, and practice with my friends, deceived by me, and with me. Let the arrogant mock me, and such as have not been, to their soul’s health, stricken and cast down by You, O my God; but I would still confess to You mine own shame in Your praise. Suffer me, I beseech You, and give me grace to go over in my present remembrance the wanderings of my bygone time, and to offer unto You the sacrifice of thanksgiving. For what am I to myself without You, but a guide to mine own downfall? or what am I even at the best, but an infant sucking the milk You give, and feeding upon You, the food that perishes not? But what sort of man is any man, seeing he is but a man? Let now the strong and the mighty laugh at us, but let us poor and needy confess unto You.

In those years I taught rhetoric, and, overcome by greed, made sale of a loquacity to overcome by. Yet I preferred (Lord, You know) honest scholars (as they are accounted), and these I, without artifice, taught artifices, not to be practiced against the life of the guiltless, though sometimes for the life of the guilty. And You, O God, from afar perceived me stumbling in that slippery course, and amid much smoke sending out some sparks of faithfulness, which I showed in that my guidance of such as loved vanity, and sought after leasing, myself their companion. In those years I had one,—not in that which is called lawful marriage, but whom I had found out in a wayward passion, void of understanding; yet but one, remaining faithful even to her; in whom I in my own case experienced what difference there is between the self-restraint of the marriage covenant, for the

sake of issue, and the bargain of a lustful love, where children are born against their parents’ will, although, once born, they constrain love.

I remember also, that when I had settled to enter the lists for a theatrical prize, some wizard asked me what I would give him to win; but I, detesting and abhorring such foul mysteries, answered, “Though the garland were of imperishable gold, I would not suffer a fly to be killed to gain me it.” For he was to kill some living creatures in his sacrifices, and by those honors to invite the devils to favor me. But this ill also I rejected, not out of a pure love for You, O God of my heart; for I knew not how to love You, who knew not how to conceive aught beyond a material brightness. And does not a soul, sighing after such fictions, commit fornication against You, trust in things unreal, and feed the wind? Still I would not in truth have sacrifices offered to devils for me, to whom I was sacrificing myself by that superstition. For what else is it to feed the wind, but to feed them, that is by going astray to become their pleasure and derision?

Those impostors then, whom they style mathematicians, I consulted without scruple; because they seemed to use no sacrifice, nor to pray to any spirit for their divinations: which are, however, Christian and true piety consistently rejects and condemns. For it is a good thing to confess unto You, and to say, have mercy upon me, heal my soul, for I have sinned against You; and not to abuse Your mercy for a license to sin, but to remember the Lord’s words, “Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee” (John 5:14). All which wholesome advice they labor to destroy, saying, “The cause of you sin is inevitably determined in heaven”; and “This did Venus, or Saturn, or Mars”: that man, in truth, flesh and blood, and proud

corruption, might be blameless; while the Creator and Ordainer of heaven and the stars is to bear the blame. And who is He but our God? The very sweetness and wellspring of righteousness, who renders to every man according to his works: and a broken and contrite heart will You not despise.

There was in those days a wise man, very skillful in physic, and renowned therein, who had with his own proconsular hand put the agonistic garland upon my distempered head, but not as a physician: for this disease You only cure, who resist the proud, and give grace to the humble. But did You fail me even by that old man, or forbear to heal my soul? For having become more acquainted with him, and hanging assiduously and fixedly on his speech (for though in simple terms, it was vivid, lively, and earnest), when he had gathered by my discourse that I was given to the books of nativity casters, he kindly and fatherly advised me to cast them away, and not fruitlessly bestow a care and diligence, necessary for useful things, upon these vanities; saying that he had in his earliest years studied that art, so as to make it the profession whereby he should live, and that, understanding Hippocrates, he could soon have understood such a study as this; and yet he had given it over, and taken to physic, for no other reason but that he found it utterly false; and he, a grave man, would not get his living by deluding people. "But you," says he, "has rhetoric to maintain yourself by, so that you follow this of free choice, not of necessity: the more then ought you to give me credit herein, who labored to acquire it so perfectly as to get my living by it alone." Of whom when I had demanded, how then could many true things be foretold by it, he answered me (as he could) "that the force of chance, diffused throughout the whole order of things, brought this about. For if when a

man by haphazard opens the pages of some poet, who sang and thought of something wholly different, a verse oftentimes fell out, wondrously agreeable to the present business: it were not to be wondered at, if out of the soul of man, unconscious what takes place in it, by some higher instinct an answer should be given, by hap, not by art, corresponding to the business and actions of the demander."

And thus much, either from or through him, You conveyed to me, and traced in my memory, what I might hereafter examine for myself. But at that time neither he, nor my dearest Nebridius, a youth singularly good and of a holy fear, who derided the whole body of divination, could persuade me to cast it aside, the authority of the authors swaying me yet more, and as yet I had found no certain proof (such as I sought) whereby it might without all doubt appear, that what had been truly foretold by those consulted was the result of haphazard, not of the art of the stargazers.

In those years when I first began to teach rhetoric in my native town, I had made one my friend, but too dear to me, from a community of pursuits, of mine own age, and, as myself, in the first opening flower of youth. He had grown up of a child with me, and we had been both schoolfellows and playfellows. But he was not yet my friend as afterwards, nor even then, as true friendship is; for true it cannot be, unless in such as You cement together, cleaving unto You, by that love which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us. Yet was it but too sweet, ripened by the warmth of kindred studies: for, from the true faith (which he as a youth had not soundly and thoroughly consumed), I had warped him also to those superstitious and pernicious fables, for which my mother

bewailed me. With me he now erred in mind, nor could my soul be without him. But behold You were close on the steps of Your fugitives, at once God of vengeance, and fountain of mercies, turning us to Yourself by wonderful means; You took that man out of this life, when he had scarce filled up one whole year of my friendship, sweet to me above all sweetness of that my life.

Who can recount all Your praises, which he has felt in his one self? What did You then, my God, and how unsearchable is the abyss of Your judgments? For long, sore sick of a fever, he lay senseless in a death sweat; and his recovery being despaired of, he was baptized, unknowing; myself meanwhile little regarding, and presuming that his soul would retain rather what it had received of me, not what was wrought on his unconscious body. But it proved far otherwise: for he was refreshed, and restored. Immediately, as soon as I could speak with him (and I could, so soon as he was able, for I never left him, and we hung but too much upon each other), I essayed to jest with him, as though he would joke with me at that baptism which he had received, when utterly absent in mind and feeling, but had now understood that he had received. But he so shrunk from me, as from an enemy; and with a wonderful and sudden freedom bade me, as I would continue his friend, forbear such language to him. I, all astonished and amazed, suppressed all my emotions till he should grow well, and his health were strong enough for me to deal with him as I would. But he was taken away from my frenzy, that with You he might be preserved for my comfort; a few days after in my absence, he was attacked again by the fever, and so departed.

At this grief my heart was utterly darkened; and whatever I beheld was death. My native country was a torment to me, and my father's house a strange unhappiness; and whatever I had

shared with him, wanting him, became a distracting torture. Mine eyes sought him everywhere, but he was not granted them; and I hated all places, for that they had not him; nor could they now tell me, "he is coming," as when he was alive and absent. I became a great riddle to myself, and I asked my soul, why she was so sad, and why she disquieted me sorely: but she knew not what to answer me. And if I said, trust in God, she very rightly obeyed me not; because that most dear friend, whom she had lost, was, being man, both truer and better than that phantasm she was bid to trust in. Only tears were sweet to me, for they succeeded my friend, in the dearest of my affections.

And now, Lord, these things are passed by, and time has assuaged my wound. May I learn from You, who are truth, and approach the ear of my heart unto Your mouth, that You may tell me why weeping is sweet to the miserable? Have You, although present everywhere, cast away our misery far from You? And You abide in Yourself, but we are tossed about in various trials. And yet unless we mourned in Your ears, we should have no hope left. Whence then is sweet fruit gathered from the bitterness of life, from groaning, tears, sighs, and complaints? Does this sweeten it, that we hope You hear? This is true of prayer, for therein is a longing to approach unto You. But is it also in grief for a thing lost, and the sorrow with which I was then overwhelmed? For I neither hoped he should return to life nor did I desire this with my tears; but I wept only and grieved. For I was miserable, and had lost my joy. Or is weeping indeed a bitter thing, and for very loathing of the things which we before enjoyed, does it then, when we shrink from them, please us?

But what speak I of these things? For now is no time to question, but to confess unto You. Wretched I was; and wretched

is every soul bound by the friendship of perishable things; he is torn asunder when he loses them, and then he feels the wretchedness which he had ere yet he lost them. So was it then with me; I wept most bitterly, and found my repose in bitterness. Thus was I wretched, and that wretched life I held dearer than my friend. For though I would willingly have changed it, yet was I more unwilling to part with it than with him; yea, I know not whether I would have parted with it even for him, as is related (if not feigned) of Pylades and Orestes, that they would gladly have died for each other or together, not to live together being to them worse than death. But in me there had arisen some unexplained feeling, too contrary to this, for at once I loathed exceedingly to live and feared to die. I suppose, the more I loved him, the more did I hate, and fear (as a most cruel enemy) death, which had bereaved me of him: and I imagined it would speedily make an end of all men, since it had power over him. Thus was it with me, I remember. Behold my heart, O my God, behold and see into me; for well I remember it, O my hope, who cleanses me from the impurity of such affections, directing mine eyes towards You, and plucking my feet out of the snare. For I wondered that others, subject to death, did live, since he whom I loved, as if he should never die, was dead; and I wondered yet more that myself, who was to him a second self, could live, he being dead. Well said one of his friends, "You half of my soul"; for I felt that my soul and his soul were "one soul in two bodies": and therefore was my life a horror to me, because I would not live halved. And therefore by chance I feared to die, lest he whom I had much loved should die wholly.

O madness, which knows not how to love men, like men!
O foolish man that I then was, enduring impatiently the lot of

man! I fretted then, sighed, wept, was distracted; had neither rest nor counsel. For I bore about a shattered and bleeding soul, impatient of being borne by me, yet where to repose it, I found not. Not in calm groves, not in games and music, nor in fragrant spots, nor in curious banquetings, nor in the pleasures of the bed and the couch; nor (finally) in books or poetry, found it repose. All things looked ghastly, yea, the very light; whatsoever was not what he was, was revolting and hateful, except groaning and tears. For in those alone found I a little refreshment. But when my soul was withdrawn from them a huge load of misery weighed me down. To You, O Lord, it ought to have been raised, for You to lighten; I knew it; but neither could nor would; the more, since, when I thought of You, You were not to me any solid or substantial thing. For You were not Yourself, but a mere phantom, and my error was my God. If I offered to discharge my load thereon, that it might rest, it glided through the void, and came rushing down again on me; and I had remained to myself a hapless spot, where I could neither be, nor be from thence. For where should my heart flee from my heart? To what place should I flee from myself? To what place not follow myself? And yet I fled out of my country; for so should mine eyes less look for him, where they were not accustomed to see him. And thus from Thagaste, I came to Carthage.

Times lose no time; nor do they roll idly by; through our senses they work strange operations on the mind. Behold, they went and came day by day, and by coming and going, introduced into my mind other imaginations and other remembrances; and little by little patched me up again with my old kind of delights, unto which that my sorrow gave way. And yet there succeeded, not indeed other griefs, yet the causes of other griefs. For from

what place had that former grief so easily reached my very inmost soul, but that I had poured out my soul upon the dust, in loving one that must die, as if he would never die? For what restored and refreshed me chiefly was the solaces of other friends, with whom I did love, what instead of You I loved; and this was a great fable, and protracted lie, by whose adulterous stimulus, our soul, which lay itching in our ears, was being defiled. But that fable would not die to me, so often as any of my friends died. There were other things which in them did more take my mind; to talk and joke together, to do kind offices by turns; to read together honied books; to play the fool or be earnest together; to dissent at times without discontent, as a man might with his own self; and even with the seldomness of these dissentings, to season our more frequent consentings; sometimes to teach, and sometimes learn; long for the absent with impatience; and welcome the coming with joy. These and the like expressions, proceeding out of the hearts of those that loved and were loved again, by the countenance, the tongue, the eyes, and a thousand pleasing gestures, were so much fuel to melt our souls together, and out of many make but one.

This is it that is loved in friends; and so loved, that a man's conscience condemns itself, if he love not him that loves him again, or love not again him that loves him, looking for nothing from his person but indications of his love. Therefore that mourning, if one die, and darkenings of sorrows, that steeping of the heart in tears, all sweetness turned to bitterness; and upon the loss of life of the dying, the death of the living. Blessed whoever loves You, and his friend in You, and his enemy for You. For he alone loses none dear to him, to whom all are dear in Him who cannot be lost. And who is this but our God, the God that

made heaven and earth, and filled them, because by filling them He created them? You none lose, but who leaves. And who leaves You, to what place goes or to what place flees he, but from You well-pleased, to You displeased? For where does he not find Your law in his own punishment? And Your law is truth, and truth You.

Turn us, O God of hosts, show us Your countenance, and we shall be whole. For whithersoever the soul of man turns itself, unless toward You, it is riveted upon sorrows, yea though it is riveted on things beautiful. And yet they, out of You, and out of the soul, were not, unless they were from You. They rise, and set; and by rising, they begin as it were to be; they grow, that they may be perfected; and perfected, they wax old and wither; and all grow not old, but all wither. So then when they rise and tend to be, the more quickly they grow that they may be, so much the more they haste not to be. This is the law of them. Thus much have You allotted them, because they are portions of things, which exist not all at once, but by passing away and succeeding, they together complete that universe, whereof they are portions. And even thus is our speech completed by signs giving forth a sound: but this again is not perfected unless one word pass away when it has sounded its part, that another may succeed. Out of all these things let my soul praise You, O God, Creator of all; yet let not my soul be riveted unto these things with the glue of love, through the senses of the body. For they go from where they were to go, that they might not be; and they rend her with pestilent longings, because she longs to be, yet loves to repose in what she loves. But in these things is no place of repose; they abide not, they flee; and who can follow them with the senses of the flesh? yea, who can grasp them, when they are hard by? For the sense of the flesh is slow, because it is the sense of the flesh; and thereby is

it bounded. It suffices for that it was made for; but it suffices not to stay things running their course from their appointed starting place to the end appointed. For in Your Word, by which they are created, they hear their decree, “from this time and up to that time.”

Be not foolish, O my soul, nor become deaf in the ear of your heart with the tumult of your folly. Hearken you too. The word itself calls you to return: and there is the place of rest imperturbable, where love is not forsaken, if itself forsakes not. Behold, these things pass away, that others may replace them, and so this lower universe be completed by all his parts. But do I depart any place? says the Word of God. There fix your dwelling, trust there whatsoever you have from that place, O my soul, at least now you are tired out with vanities. Entrust truth, whatsoever you have from the truth, and you shall lose nothing; and your decay shall bloom again, and all your diseases be healed, and your mortal parts be reformed and renewed, and bound around you: nor shall they lay you to what place themselves descend; but they shall stand fast with you, and abide for ever before God, who abides and stands fast for ever.

Why then be perverted and follow your flesh? Be it converted and follow you. Whatever by her you have sense of, is in part; and the whole, of which these are parts, you know not; and yet they delight you. But had the sense of your flesh a capacity for comprehending the whole, and not itself also, for your punishment, been justly restricted to a part of the whole, you would, that whatsoever exists at this present, should pass away, that so the whole might better please you. For what we speak also, by the same sense of the flesh you hear; yet would not you have the syllables stay, but fly away, that others may come, and you hear

the whole. And so ever, when any one thing is made up of many, all of which do not exist together, all collectively would please more than they do severally, could all be perceived collectively. But far better than these is He who made all; and He is our God, nor does He pass away, for neither does anything succeed Him.

If bodies please you, praise God on occasion of them, and turn back your love upon their maker; lest in these things which please you, you displease. If souls please you, be they loved in God: for they too are mutable, but in Him are they firmly established; else would they pass, and pass away. In Him then be they beloved; and carry unto Him along with you what souls you can, and say to them, “Him let us love, Him let us love: He made these, nor is He far off. For He did not make them, and so depart, but they are of Him, and in Him. See there He is, where truth is loved. He is within the very heart, yet has the heart strayed from Him. Go back into your heart, you transgressors, and cleave fast to Him that made you. Stand with Him, and you shall stand fast. Rest in Him, and ye shall be at rest. To what place go you in rough ways? To what place go you? The good that you love is from Him; but it is good and pleasant through reference to Him, and justly shall it be embittered, because unjustly is anything loved which is from Him, if He be forsaken for it. To what end then would you still and still walk these difficult and toilsome ways? There is no rest, where you seek it. Seek what you seek; but it is not there where you seek. You seek a blessed life in the land of death; it is not there. For how should there be a blessed life where life itself is not?

“But our true life came down to this place, and bore our death, and slew Him, out of the abundance of His own life: and He thundered, calling aloud to us to return from this place to

Him into that secret place, whence He came forth to us, first into the Virgin's womb, wherein He espoused the human creation, our mortal flesh, that it might not be for ever mortal, and from that place like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, rejoicing as a giant to run his course (Psalm 19:5). For He lingered not, but ran, calling aloud by words, deeds, death, life, descent, ascension; crying aloud to us to return unto Him. And He departed from our eyes, that we might return into our heart, and there find Him. For He departed, and to, He is here. He would not be long with us, yet left us not; for He departed there, from what place He never parted, because the world was made by Him. And in this world He was, and into this world He came to save sinners, unto whom my soul confesses, and He heals it, for it hath sinned against Him. O you sons of men, how long so slow of heart (Luke 24:25)? Even now, after the descent of life to you, will you not ascend and live? But to what place ascend you, when you are on high, and set your mouth against the heavens? Descend, that you may ascend, and ascend to God. For you have fallen, by ascending against Him." Tell them this, that they may weep in the valley of tears, and so carry them up with you unto God; because out of His Spirit you speak this unto them, if you speak, burning with the fire of charity.

These things I then knew not, and I loved these lower beauties, and I was sinking to the very depths, and to my friends I said, "Do we love anything but the beautiful? What then is the beautiful? and what is beauty? What is it that attracts and wins us to the things we love? For unless there were in them a grace and beauty, they could by no means draw us unto them." And I marked and perceived that in bodies themselves, there was a beauty, from their forming a sort of whole, and again, another

from apt and mutual correspondence, as of a part of the body with its whole, or a shoe with a foot, and the like. And this consideration sprang up in my mind, out of my inmost heart, and I wrote "on the fair and fit," I think, two or three books. You know, O Lord, for it is gone from me; for I have them not, but they are strayed from me, I know not how.

But what moved me, O Lord my God, to dedicate these books unto Hierius, an orator of Rome, whom I knew not by face, but loved for the fame of his learning which was eminent in him, and some words of his I had heard, which pleased me? But more did he please me, for that he pleased others, who highly extolled him, amazed that out of a Syrian, first instructed in Greek eloquence, should afterwards be formed a wonderful Latin orator, and one most learned in things pertaining unto philosophy. One is commended, and, unseen, he is loved: Does this love enter the heart of the hearer from the mouth of the commender? Not so. But by one who loves is another kindled. For from this place he is loved who is commended, when the commender is believed to extol him with an unfeigned heart; that is, when one that loves him, praises him.

For so did I then love men, upon the judgment of men, not Yours, O my God, in whom no man is deceived. But yet why not for qualities, like those of a famous charioteer, or fighter with beasts in the theater, known far and wide by a vulgar popularity, but far otherwise, and earnestly, and so as I would be myself commended? For I would not be commended or loved, as actors are (though I myself did commend and love them), but had rather be unknown, than so known; and even hated, than so loved. Where now are the impulses to such various and various kinds of loves laid up in one soul? Why, since we are equally

men, do I love in another what, if I did not hate, I should not spurn and cast from myself? For it holds not, that as a good horse is loved by him, who would not, though he might, be that horse, therefore the same may be said of an actor, who shares our nature. Do I then love in a man, what I hate to be, who am a man? Man himself is a great deep, whose very hairs You number (Matthew 10:30), O Lord, and they fall not to the ground without You. And yet are the hairs of his head easier to be numbered than his feelings, and the beatings of his heart.

But that orator was of that sort whom I loved, as wishing to be myself such; and I erred through a swelling pride, and was tossed about with every wind, but yet was steered by You, though very secretly. And from what place do I know, and from what place do I confidently confess unto You, that I had loved him more for the love of his commenders, than for the very things for which he was commended? Because, had he been unpraised, and these self-same men had dispraised him, and with dispraise and contempt told the very same things of him, I had never been so kindled and excited to love him. And yet the things had not been other, nor he himself other; but only the feelings of the relators. See where the impotent soul lies along, that is not yet stayed up by the solidity of truth! Just as the gales of tongues blow from the breast of the opinionated, so is it carried this way and that, driven forward and backward, and the light is overclouded to it, and the truth unseen. And to, it is before us. And it was to me a great matter, that my discourse and labors should be known to that man: which should he approve, I were the more kindled; but if he disapproved, my empty heart, void of Your solidity, had been wounded. And yet the “fair and fit,” on which I wrote to him, I

dwelt on with pleasure, and surveyed it, and admired it, though none joined therein.

But I saw not yet, on which this weighty matter turned in Your wisdom, O You omnipotent, who only does wonders; and my mind ranged through corporeal forms; and “fair,” I defined and distinguished what is so in itself, and “fit,” whose beauty is in correspondence to some other thing: and this I supported by corporeal examples. And I turned to the nature of the mind, but the false notion which I had of spiritual things, let me not see the truth. Yet the force of truth did of itself flash into mine eyes, and I turned away my panting soul from incorporeal substance to lineaments, and colors, and bulky magnitudes. And not being able to see these in the mind, I thought I could not see my mind. And whereas in virtue I loved peace, and in viciousness I abhorred discord; in the first I observed a unity, but in the other, a sort of division. And in that unity I conceived the rational soul, and the nature of truth and of the chief good to consist; but in this division I miserably imagined there to be some unknown substance of irrational life, and the nature of the chief evil, which should not only be a substance, but real life also, and yet not derived from You, O my God, of whom are all things. And yet that first I called a Monad, as it had been a soul without sex; but the latter a Duad;—anger, in deeds of violence, and in flagitiousness, lust; not knowing of which I spoke. For I had not known or learned that neither was evil a substance, nor our soul that chief and unchangeable good.

For as deeds of violence arise, if that emotion of the soul be corrupted, from what place vehement action springs, stirring itself insolently and unruly; and lusts, when that affection of the soul is ungoverned, whereby carnal pleasures are drunk in,

so do errors and false opinions defile the conversation, if the reasonable soul itself be corrupted; as it was then in me, who knew not that it must be enlightened by another light, that it may be partaker of truth, seeing itself is not that nature of truth. For You shall light my candle, O Lord my God, You shall enlighten my darkness: and of Your fullness have we all received, for You are the true light that lights every man that comes into the world (John 1:9); for in You there is no variableness, neither shadow of change.

But I pressed toward You, and was thrust from You, that I might taste of death: for You resist the proud. But what prouder, than for me with a strange madness to maintain myself to be that by nature which You are? For whereas I was subject to change (so much being manifest to me, my very desire to become wise, being the wish, of worse to become better), yet chose I rather to imagine You subject to change, and myself not to be that which You are. Therefore I was repelled by You, and You resisted my vain stiff-neckedness, and I imagined corporeal forms, and, myself flesh, I accused flesh; and a wind that passes away, I returned not to You, but I passed on and on to things which have no being, neither in You, nor in me, nor in the body. Neither were they created for me by Your truth, but by my vanity devised out of things corporeal. And I was accustomed to ask Your faithful little ones, my fellow citizens (from whom, unknown to myself, I stood exiled), I was accustomed, prating and foolishly, to ask them, “Why then does the soul err which God created?” But I would not be asked, “Why then does God err?” And I maintained that Your unchangeable substance did err upon constraint, rather than confess that my changeable substance had gone astray voluntarily, and now, in punishment, lay in error.

I was then some six or seven and twenty years old when I wrote those volumes; revolving within me corporeal fictions, buzzing in the ears of my heart, which I turned, O sweet truth, to You inward melody, meditating on the “fair and fit,” and longing to stand and hearken to You, and to rejoice greatly at the bridegroom’s voice, but could not; for by the voices of mine own errors, I was hurried abroad, and through the weight of my own pride, I was sinking into the lowest pit. For You did not make me to hear joy and gladness, nor did the bones exult which were not yet humbled. And what did it profit me, that scarce twenty years old, a book of Aristotle, which they call the often Predicaments, falling into my hands (on whose very name I hung, as on something great and divine, so often as my rhetoric master of Carthage, and others, accounted learned, mouthed it with cheeks bursting with pride), I read and understood it unaided? And on my conferring with others, who said that they scarcely understood it with very able tutors, not only orally explaining it, but drawing many things in sand, they could tell me no more of it than I had learned, reading it by myself. And the book appeared to me to speak very clearly of substances, such as “man,” and of their qualities, as the figure of a man, of what sort it is; and stature, how many feet high; and his relationship, whose brother he is; or where placed; or when born; or whether he stands or sits; or be shod or armed; or does, or suffers anything; and all the innumerable things which might be ranged under these nine Predicaments, of which I have given some specimens, or under that chief predicament of substance.

What did all this further me, seeing it even hindered me? When, imagining whatever was, was comprehended under those often Predicaments, I essayed in such wise to understand, O my

God, Your wonderful and unchangeable unity also, as if You also had been subjected to Your own greatness or beauty; so that (as in bodies) they should exist in You, as their subject: whereas You Yourself are Your greatness and beauty; but a body is not great or fair in that it is a body, seeing that, though it were less great or fair, it should notwithstanding be a body. But it was falsehood which of You I conceived, not truth, fictions of my misery, not the realities of Your blessedness. For You had commanded, and it was done in me, that the earth should bring forth briars and thorns to me, and that in the sweat of my brows I should eat my bread.

And what did it profit me, that all the books I could procure of the so-called liberal arts, I, the vile slave of vile affections, read by myself, and understood? And I delighted in them, but knew not from what place came all, that therein was true or certain. For I had my back to the light, and my face to the things enlightened; from what place my face, with which I discerned the things enlightened, itself was not enlightened. Whatever was written, either on rhetoric, or logic, geometry, music, and arithmetic, by myself without much difficulty or any instructor, I understood, You know, O Lord my God; because both quickness of understanding, and acuteness in discerning, is Your gift: yet did I not thence sacrifice to You. So then it served not to my use, but rather to my perdition, since I went about to get so good a portion of my substance into my own keeping; and I kept not my strength for You, but wandered from You into a far country, to spend it upon harlotries. For what profited me good abilities, not employed to good uses? For I felt not that those arts were attained with great difficulty, even by the studious and talented, until I attempted to explain them to such; when he most excelled in them who followed me not altogether slowly.

But what did this further me, imagining that You, O Lord God, the truth, were a vast and bright body, and I a fragment of that body? Perverseness too great! But such was I. Nor do I blush, O my God, to confess to You Your mercies towards me, and to call upon You, who blushed not then to profess to men my blasphemies, and to bark against You. What profited me then my nimble wit in those sciences and all those most knotty volumes, unraveled by me, without aid from human instruction; seeing I erred so foully, and with such sacrilegious shamefulness, in the doctrine of piety? Or what hindrance was a far slower wit to Your little ones, since they departed not far from You, that in the nest of Your church they might securely be fledged, and nourish the wings of charity, by the food of a sound faith. O Lord our God, under the shadow of Your wings let us hope; protect us, and carry us. You will carry us both when little, and even to gray hairs will You carry us; for our firmness, when it is You, then is it firmness; but when our own, it is infirmity. Our good ever lives with You; from which when we turn away, we are turned aside. Let us now, O Lord, return, that we may not be overturned, because with You our good lives without any decay, which good are You; nor need we fear, lest there be no place whither to return, because we fell from it: for through our absence, our mansion fell not—Your eternity.