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*THE FATHERS
OF THE CHURCH*

A NEW TRANSLATION

VOLUME 20

THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH

A NEW TRANSLATION

Founded by
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SAINT AUGUSTINE

LETTERS

VOLUME III (131-164)

Translated by

SISTER WILFRID PARSONS, S.N.D.

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U. S. A.

WRITINGS
OF
SAINT AUGUSTINE

VOLUME 11

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INTRODUCTION

THE LETTERS INCLUDED in this Volume (131-164) cover the short period from 412 to 414. This was a time of intense activity for Augustine and his correspondence shows him straining every fiber in defense of the Church. His overriding preoccupation was with the newly rising Pelagian heresy, which he instantly recognized as more dangerous to the faith than any that had hitherto challenged him. Letter 140, which he called 'The Book of Grace according to the New Testament', is his first polemical letter in this campaign, and it is appropriately addressed to a catechumen, Honoratus, who had submitted five questions on points of Scripture. Augustine used these questions to develop his own teaching on grace and free will. Subsequently, he took up the origin of the soul (143), so closely connected with the question of redemptive grace, and the fate of infants who die without baptism (156, 157). Hilarius had raised this question and Augustine saw it as part of the doctrine of grace then under attack by Pelagius. There is one letter to Pelagius himself (146), short and non-committal, but conciliatory in tone, showing that Augustine must have hoped to reclaim him by the charitable treatment he was always advocating toward heretics. When the heresiarch made a dishonest use of this letter as part of his defense at the Synod of Diospolis, Augustine was forced to express himself more vigorously. He was to be deeply

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concerned with these problems to the end of his life, even in letters not dealing specifically with them.

With his energies so thoroughly absorbed in this new conflict, it was well for Augustine that Donatism was dying out. The Conference held at Carthage in 411, at which Marcellinus had presided as representative of the emperor, had resulted in a complete exposure and condemnation of this violent sect, and was followed by some extremely severe imperial decrees. The subsequent letters on this subject show a different tone. As the Donatists have lost their case and have now been shown up for what they are, it is no longer necessary to thunder at them. Instead, the bishop addresses himself to the civil authorities (133, 134, 139) to beg that the ultimate punishment may not be inflicted, because this would appear like revenge on the part of Catholics, and besides, what is really wanted is the conversion of the Donatists, not their destruction. He was now convinced that the intervention of the secular arm to curb religious strife was not only beneficial to the public weal but was also helpful to individual souls. Some encouraging conversions, among them that of the whole city of Cirta (144), had resulted when well-meaning persons were released from the fear of retaliation on the part of vengeful Donatist clerics. This schism did not die out at once however; there were a few expiring flare-ups before it was extinguished, and there will be other letters on this subject.

The active and anti-Donatist part played by the tribune Marcellinus at the Conference of Carthage was to bring tragedy to him and great sorrow to Augustine. After the revolt of Heraclian against Honorius, Marcellinus and his brother, the proconsul Apringius, were arrested by Count Marinus, who was supposed to restore order in Africa. The

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Donatists, smarting from their defeat, found Marinus a compliant official, and hurried the execution of the two brothers without trial and before an effort could be made to rescue them. In Letter 151 to Caecilian we have a sad description of this travesty of justice as well as a noble tribute to Marcellinus, who must have been a perfect Christian gentleman. Caecilian, who was prefect of the province, does not escape the suspicion of being accessory to the deed, at least to the extent of doing nothing to prevent it. Augustine gives him the benefit of the doubt, but the reader is not so sure.

There are two letters from Marcellinus and two to him in this series, and in one of them (138) Augustine shows that Christ's exhortation to meekness and forgiveness of injuries is not inconsistent with the duty of maintaining discipline in a Christian commonwealth. In discussing this problem, the writer repeats the generally received definition of the state according to the ancient philosophers as "the generality of men united by the bond of common agreement," but goes on to show that these principles of agreement have not been worked out by human arguments but have been written in human hearts by divine authority. He shows that there has to be a kind severity in dealing with delinquency, and adds that war could be a sign of God's mercy if it were waged by the good in order to put down evil and destroy vice which should have been curbed by the rightful government. Pacifists of today might be interested to know that Christian practice does not condemn war in general and that St. Augustine proves this point by texts from Scripture.

As in other periods of his life the busy and harassed bishop continued to be assailed with all kinds of questions. To Paulina

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(147) he explained at length, with a wealth of Scriptural proof, how we see God, and he prefaced his arguments with a careful little lesson, as if he were teaching a class, on the nature and operation of the five senses and the difference between visual and mental images. Paulinus of Nola received an answer in 149 to his letter of four years before (121), and with it came a lesson in semantics, with some subtle hair-splitting in the meanings of words. Apparently, Augustine could never resist the fascination of words and he let himself go to some length, even drawing on Greek to make his meaning clear, as he might have done when he was a teacher of rhetoric. The words in question were those used by St. Paul, and also in the Mass, to express adoration, prayer, and thanksgiving. Macedonius, Vicar of Africa, made a rueful but respectful complaint on what looked to him like interference with justice on the part of the Bishop of Hippo, who too often came to beg leniency for culprits, especially heretics, when they appeared before him for judgment. He asked if that were a religious thing for a bishop to do. Augustine assured him that it was fully in accord with a bishop's office to intervene between crime and punishment when there was hope of saving the sinner. This Macedonius gives us a contemporary reference to the *City of God*, of which, in 414, he had just received the first three books. Fortunatianus, one of the seven bishops chosen to represent the Catholic side at the Conference of Carthage, had evidently given Augustine to understand that a brother bishop, not named, had taken offense at some strong language used by Augustine in his argument that we do not see God with bodily eyes. This anonymous bishop seems to have been an anthropomorphist who could not imagine any other kind of sight than that of the eyes. This letter shows the tender

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charity felt by Augustine for all his colleagues and he apologizes for the vigor of his language, but nevertheless reaffirms all that he had said. Proba reappears in the correspondence with her daughter-in-law Juliana. Their respective granddaughter and daughter, Demetrias, had become a consecrated virgin and the noble ladies received a graceful and almost effusive note of congratulation from the Bishop of Hippo. The Volusian of Letters 132, 135, and 137 was a member of the family of Melania, being the brother of Albina and the uncle of the younger Melania. He seems to have been a highly educated aristocrat with a strong taste for Scriptural and theological studies. Augustine urged him strongly to apply himself to the sacred letters and to send on any passages he did not understand. This was an invitation not to be overlooked and Volusian sent in a set of difficulties, embellished with a quotation from Vergil's *Eclogues*, and including such abstruse points as the reality of Christ's Body in the Incarnation and the ever-troublesome question of miracles.

The last seven letters of this volume form a series exchanged between Augustine and his boyhood friend, Evodius, Bishop of Uzala. The latter asked some complicated questions and because of their friendship Augustine could exclaim impatiently: 'You ask too many questions of a busy man and you seem to think that they can be answered offhand and at once.' He goes on to suggest that Evodius can quite well hunt up his own answers in some of Augustine's treatises. One of his difficulties was in his inability to conceive of a purely spiritual substance. He seems to have had apparitions or dreams in which he saw angels or spirits from the dead, and he argued that these must have some kind of body or how could they be seen, how could they go from place to place,

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and how could they be numbered? Augustine referred his friend to his work on Genesis (*De Genesi ad litteram*), reminded him of the discussions they had together which were committed to writing in *De quantitate animae*, and urged him to do some thinking of his own. But, busy as he was, Augustine could not resist telling a ghost story of his own in which an angel proved to a certain Gennadius, a pious doctor, that what he saw in vision was not seen by bodily eyes, and therefore was not corporeal.

Much of Augustine's thinking during these years was concerned with the distinction between matter and spirit and it overflows into several of his letters. The more practical matters of earlier years were quite evidently giving way to purely intellectual questions, and in these there was no one of his time who could find the heart of a difficulty so keenly or answer it so lucidly, whether his correspondent was an intellectual like himself or just one of average mentality. That was why all these questions found their way to him.

LETTERS

131-164

Translated

by

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*131. Augustine to the noble lady, his deservedly esteemed
and most excellent daughter, Proba¹ (c. 412)*

It is true, as you say, that the soul, housed in a corruptible body, is affected by a certain earthly contagion, and is, in a sense, bowed down and bent under such a burden that it more readily covets and thinks of the many things in the depths than of the one thing on high. 'For the corruptible body is a load upon the soul, and the earthly habitation presseth down the mind that museth upon many things.'² With one saving word, our Saviour raised up that woman in the Gospel³ who had been bowed down for eighteen years—perhaps she is signified by these words—and His purpose was that the Christian soul should not listen in vain to "Lift up your heart," nor answer in vain that she had lifted it up to the Lord.⁴ Considering this, you do well to regard the

¹ Cf. Letter 130.

² Wisd. 9.15.

³ Luke 13.11-13.

⁴ These words are part of the responses sung or recited before the Preface of the Mass.

evils of this world as bearable, in view of our hope of the future. For, thus these things are changed into good by our good use of them, so long as they exercise our patience without increasing our covetous desire. Of this the Apostle says: 'We know that to them that love God, all things work together unto good.'⁵ He says 'All things'; therefore, not only those that are sought after as pleasant, but also those that are avoided as unpleasant, since we use the former without being ensnared, and we beat off the latter without being bruised, while we follow the divine precept by giving thanks in all to Him of whom we say: 'I will bless the Lord at all times, his praise shall be always in my mouth,'⁶ It is good for me that thou hast humbled me, that I may learn thy justifications.'⁷ Indeed, noble lady, deservedly esteemed and most excellent daughter, the human soul would not sigh for that harbor of true and certain salvation if the calm of a deceitful prosperity were always to smile upon us here. I return to your Excellency the courtesy of your greeting, and I thank you for the very religious solicitude you show for my health. I ask the Lord to grant you the rewards of the life to come as well as comfort in this present life, and I commend myself to the affection and prayer of all your household in whose hearts Christ dwells by faith.

May the true and truth-giving God truly console your heart and keep you safe, noble lady, deservedly esteemed and most excellent daughter.⁸

⁵ Rom. 8.28.

⁶ Ps. 33.2.

⁷ Ps. 118.71.

⁸ This last sentence is in another handwriting.

132. *Augustine, bishop, to the noble lord, his deservedly esteemed son, Volusian*¹ (412)

I trust I do not fall short of the prayer of your holy mother² in wishing your welfare both in this world and in Christ. Therefore, as you deserve, I return the courtesy of your greeting and, as strongly as I can, I urge you not to shrink from applying yourself to the study of the truly and surely Sacred Letters. This is a sound and substantial study; it does not allure the mind with fanciful language, nor strike a flat or wavering note by means of any deceit of the tongue.³ It appeals strongly to him who is more desirous of reality than of words, but it strikes fear into him who puts his trust in created things. I urge you especially to read the language of the Apostles; by these you will be roused to make the acquaintance of the Prophets, to whose testimony the Apostles appeal. And if, in your reading or meditation, some difficulty arises, and it seems that I could be useful in solving it, write to me and I will answer. It may even be, with the help of the Lord, that I shall do more that way than I should by speaking to you in person, partly because of your and my varied duties—since it might happen that you and I should not be free at the same time—and partly because of the importunate presence of other persons, who are usually not disposed to this pursuit, and who take more pleasure in the sword-play of words than in the enlightenment of knowledge. But, what is set down in writing is always ready to be read when the reader is ready, and its presence never becomes burdensome because it is taken up and laid aside at your pleasure.

1 Uncle of the younger Melania, brother of her mother, Albina. Cf. Letter 124.

2 The older Melania.

3 This phrase is imitated from Persius, *Satire* 5.24: '*Dignoscere cautus, Quid solidum crepet et pictae tectoria linguae.*'

133. Augustine the bishop gives greeting in the Lord to the noble and justly distinguished lord, his very dear son, Marcellinus¹ (412)

I have been informed by your Excellency that those Circumcellions and clerics of the Donatist sect, whom the law-enforcement authority had removed from Hippo for trial of their misdeeds, have had a hearing, and that several of them have confessed to having murdered Restitutus,² a Catholic priest, and having beaten Innocentius, another Catholic priest, after putting out his eye and cutting off his finger. As a result, I have been a prey to the deepest anxiety for fear your Highness might perhaps decree that they be sentenced to the utmost penalty of the law, by suffering a punishment in proportion to their deeds. Therefore, in this letter, I beg you by the faith which you have in Christ, and by the mercy of the same Lord Christ, not to do this, nor to let it be done under any circumstances. For, although we can refuse to be held responsible for the death of men who were manifestly presented for trial on no charge of ours, but on the indictment of officers whose duty it is to safeguard the public peace, we do not wish that the martyrdom of the servants of God should be avenged by similar suffering, as if by way of retaliation. However, we do not object to wicked men being deprived of their freedom to do wrong, but we wish it to go just that far, so that, without losing their life or being maimed in any part of their body, they may be restrained by the law from their mad frenzy, guided into the way of peace and sanity, and assigned to some useful work to replace their criminal activities. It is true, this is called a penalty, but who can fail to see that it

¹ Cf. Letter 128 n. 3.

² One of two delegates sent to the imperial court after the Council of Carthage in 408 to protest the cruelty and violence of the Donatists.

should be called a benefit rather than a chastisement when violence and cruelty are held in check, but the remedy of repentance is not withheld?

As a Christian judge, you must play the part of a loving father, you must show anger for wrong-doing, but remember to make allowance for human weakness; do not indulge your inclination to seek vengeance for the vile acts of sinners, but direct your effort to the cure of the sinners' wounds. Do not lose that fatherly care which you maintained throughout the inquiry, when you secured the confession of such monstrous crimes, not by stretching the defendants on the rack, nor by tearing them with hooks, nor by burning them with fire, but by beating them with rods³—a form of discipline used by schoolmasters, by parents themselves, and often even by bishops in their courts. Do not, then, punish more harshly what you discovered by gentler measures. It is more important to find out than to punish; that is why even the kindest of men search into hidden crime carefully and insistently, so as to find out whom to treat leniently. Hence it is generally necessary to carry out an inquiry ruthlessly, so that, when the guilt has been uncovered, there may be scope for moderation. Indeed, all good works love to be set in the light, not for the sake of human glory, but, as the Lord says: 'That they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.'⁴ Thus, the Apostle was not satisfied with having us preserve moderation, but he urged us to make it known to all. 'Let your modesty,' he says, 'be known to all men,'⁵ and elsewhere, 'showing mildness to all men.'⁶ There is also that well-known example of forbearance on the part of holy David, when his enemy⁷ was

³ According to Roman ideas of law, an accused person could be supposed to make a true confession of guilt only under torture.

⁴ Matt. 5.16.

⁵ Phil. 4.5.

⁶ Tit. 3.2.

⁷ Saul, in the cave of Engaddi; cf. 1 Kings 24.1-8.

delivered into his hands and he spared him, an example which shines with greater lustre from the fact that he had power to act otherwise. Do not, then, let your power of punishment make you harsh, when the necessity of inquiry did not shake your spirit of mildness. Do not seek out the executioner now that you have established the guilt, when you refused the services of the torturer in order to discover the guilt.

Finally, you have been delegated to this task for the benefit of the Church. I maintain that this course of action is advantageous to the Catholic Church, or, at least, not to go outside the limits of my diocese, that it is advantageous to the Church at Hippo Regius. If you will not hear the request of a friend, hear the considered opinion of a bishop; in fact, since I am speaking to a Christian, I may say without conceit, in a matter of such importance, that it is your duty to listen when a bishop commands, noble Sir, my deservedly illustrious and well-loved son. I know the origin of the ecclesiastical cases which have mostly been referred to your Excellency, but, as I believe, the responsibility belongs to that distinguished man, the estimable proconsul.⁸ I have written a letter to him, too, which I ask you to deliver to him yourself, and to call to his attention, in case of need, if you do not mind. Again I beseech both of you not to think me importunate in my intervention or advice or anxiety, not to allow the sufferings of the Catholic servants of God, which ought to be of value for the spiritual encouragement of the weak, to be cheapened by a retaliatory punishment of the enemies who made them suffer. Instead, lay aside the severity of the judge and, since you are sons of the Church, be zealous in showing approval of the moderation of your holy Mother. May the almighty God enrich your Excellency with all good things, noble lord, deservedly distinguished and well-beloved son.

⁸ Apringius, brother of Marcellinus. Cf. Letter 134.

134. Augustine to the noble lord, Apringius,¹ his justly exalted and distinguished son (412)

In exercising the power which God has given you, a man over men, I am sure you call to mind the divine judgment at which judges, too, will have to give an account of their judgments. I know, of course, that you are steeped in the Christian faith, and this gives me greater confidence in addressing your Excellency not only with a request, but even with a warning, because of the Lord, in whose heavenly household you are enrolled along with us, in whom we have the same hope of eternal life, and to whom we pray for you during the holy Mysteries. Therefore, noble lord, deservedly exalted and distinguished son, I ask first of all that I may not seem unmannerly in thus intruding upon your field of action with the anxiety which I must needs feel deeply for the Church entrusted to me, whose interests I am bound to serve, and which I desire to benefit rather than to rule. Secondly, I beg that you do not refuse to hear nor delay to agree to what I urge or request.

An indictment, despatched in advance through the vigilance of the guardians of public order, has brought certain Circumcellions and Donatists under the authority of the courts and the law. These were examined by your brother, my son Marcellinus, a distinguished man and estimable tribune and legate, and without the use of hooks or fire, but solely under the constraint of the rod, they confessed that they had committed revolting crimes against my brothers and fellow priests, as, for example, that they had waylaid one of these and killed him, and that they had abducted another from his house and mutilated him by putting out his eye and cutting off his finger. When I heard that they had confessed to these crimes, I had not the

¹ Proconsul of Africa, brother of Marcellinus. Cf. Letter 128.

slightest doubt that they would be subject to capital punishment at your hands, so I have made haste to write this letter to your Nobility, begging and praying you by the mercy of Christ, as we rejoice in your great and certain happiness, not to allow similar tortures to be inflicted on them, although, to be sure, the law cannot punish them by stoning or by cutting off a finger or plucking out an eye, acts which their cruelty made possible for them. Therefore, I am at ease about the men who have confessed these deeds that they will not suffer reciprocal treatment, but what I fear is that either they or the others who have been convicted of murder may be sentenced according to the full weight of your authority. As a bishop I warn a Christian, as a Christian I appeal to a judge not to let this happen.

It is of you that the Apostle spoke, as we read it, that you bear not the sword in vain, and that you be God's ministers, avengers against those that do evil.² But, ruling a province is different from ruling a Church; the former must be governed by instilling fear, the latter is to be made lovable by the use of mildness. If I were making my plea to a non-Christian judge, I should deal differently with him, but even so I should not fail to present the case of the Church and, as far as he would allow, I should insist that the sufferings of the servants of God, which ought to serve as a pattern of patience, should not be sullied with the blood of their enemies. If, however, he would not agree to this, I should suspect that his opposition came from a hostile source. But now, since the matter is being brought before you, I follow another method, another argument. We see in you a governor of exalted power, but we also recognize you as a son with a Christian idea of duty. Leaving out of consideration your exalted position and your faith, I am treating a matter

2 Rom. 13.4.

of common interest with you; you can act in it as I cannot; consult with us about it and lend us a helping hand.

As a result of prudent action, the enemies of the Church have confessed the revolting crimes which they have committed against Catholic clerics, and they have incriminated themselves by their own words, whereas they usually ensnare inexperienced souls with their false and seductive talk, boasting of the persecution which they claim to suffer. The court records should be read in order to heal the souls which they have envenomed with their deadly enticement. Surely it would not please you that we should fear to read to the end of these records, if they should include the blood-thirsty punishment of these culprits, supposing we laid aside our conscientious fear that those who have suffered should seem to have rendered evil for evil.³ Therefore, if there were no other punishment decreed for curbing the wickedness of desperate men, extreme necessity might require that such men be put to death, although, as far as we are concerned, if no lesser punishment were possible for them, we should prefer to let them go free, rather than avenge the martyrdom of our brothers by shedding their blood. But, now that there is another possible punishment by which the mildness of the Church can be made evident, and the violent excess of savage men be restrained, why do you not commute your sentence to a more prudent and more lenient one, as judges have the liberty of doing even in non-ecclesiastical cases? Share, then, our fear of the judgment of God the Father, and show forth the mildness of our Mother. For, when you act, the Church acts, for whose sake and as whose son you act. Strive to outdo the wicked in goodness. By a monstrous crime they tore limbs from a living body; do you by a work of mercy make them apply to some useful work the wholly

³ Rom. 12.17.

intact limbs which they exercised in their unspeakable deeds. They did not spare the servants of God who were preaching repentance to them; do you spare them, now that you have arrested, summoned, and convicted them. They shed Christian blood with impious sword; do you, for Christ's sake, withhold even the sword of the law from their blood. They cut short the life-span of a minister of the Church by killing him; do you lengthen the span of years for the living enemies of the Church that they may repent. It befits you, a Christian judge, in a case involving the Church, to be such as this; for this we beg, we urge, we intervene. Men are wont to appeal from a too light sentence when their convicted enemies are treated too leniently, but we so love our enemies that we would appeal from your severe sentence if we did not rely on your Christian obedience. May the almighty God preserve your Excellency to a richer and happier life, illustrious lord justly exalted and most excellent son.

135. Volusian¹ to Bishop Augustine, truly holy lord, his deservedly revered father (412)

You ask me, upright man that you are and model of righteousness, to list for you some doubtful points, met in my learned reading, about which I need to be instructed. I embrace as a favor the duty enjoined on me, and I enroll myself with eagerness in your school, following the authority of the old saying that no age has a monopoly on learning. Not without reason did the wise man refuse to set limits or bounds to the study of prudence, since virtue, a long way from its beginnings, would never be so open to those who approach it that it would be fully and immediately revealed to our recognition, truly holy lord and deservedly revered

¹ Cf. Letter 132.

father. It is worth our while to recall that we recently had a conversation together. We were present at certain assemblies of friends where many sentiments were expressed according to their several dispositions and pursuits. The talk was rhetorically arranged in parts. I am speaking to an adept, for you taught that subject not so long ago. One topic was piled on another: what should be the forcefulness of arrangement; how much effort to expend on the presentation; what pleasure is afforded by transposition and what beauty by imagery; even what eloquence of style is adapted to one's native ability and the nature of the subject. Some also extolled the poetic art which they favored, and you do not leave even this department of style unsung and unhonored,² as the poet appropriately said: 'Allow the ivy to twine your brow, amid the laurels of victory.'³ The next topic discussed was the amount of adornment to be attributed to the arrangement of one's material: how much charm is afforded by metaphor, and how much loftiness by comparison. Again, we discussed smooth and polished verse, and, if I may say so, the controlled variety of pauses. Then the conversation turned to your beloved philosophy, which you were accustomed to cherish as something reserved to the initiate,⁴ in the Aristotelian manner. We also inquired into what the master of the Lyceum⁵ achieved; what was the object of the complicated and long-drawn-out dallying of the Academy;⁶ what the value of that debate from the Arcade;⁷ what skill the nature-

2 This seems to be a reference to Augustine's praise of poetry in his *De musica*.

3 Vergil, *Ec.* 8.13. Poets were crowned with ivy, as victorious generals were with laurel. The appropriateness of this quotation is not clear. Vergil was addressing Pollio, a general, fresh from military victory.

4 Another text has *Isocraticam*, like Isocrates, instead of *esotericam*, followed in this version.

5 Aristotle taught in the Lyceum, a school near Athens.

6 Cf. Letter 118 n. 18. Plato taught in the Academe or Grove.

7 Cf. Letter 118 n. 17.

philosophers had;⁸ what was the Epicurean idea of pleasure;⁹ and why there was an unlimited passion for debate among them, with truth only the more unknown in spite of their preliminary agreement about what can be known.

In the midst of this, the memory of our conversation lingered with me, and one of many asked: 'Who is endowed with wisdom to the perfect measure of the Christian; who can solve the doubts in which I am entangled; who can enlighten my doubting faculties and strengthen them with true or probable systems of belief?' We were struck dumb. Then he rushed on of his own accord, in this fashion: 'I wonder whether the Lord and Ruler of the world filled the womb of the chaste Virgin; whether that mother "bore the long weariness of ten months,"¹⁰ and nevertheless brought Him forth as a virgin according to the usual method of birth, and afterwards was reputed an inviolate virgin.' He added other objections to these. 'He to whom the universe can scarcely be compared lies hid within the tiny body of a wailing infant; He endures the years of childhood, He grows to be a youth, His strength develops into manhood, and so long a time that Ruler is absent from His throne, and all the care of the whole world is transferred into one small body! Moreover, He relaxes in sleep, He is nourished by food, He is subject to all the feelings of mortals, and gives no clear indication of such great majesty by any suitable signs. As for driving out evil spirits, cure of the sick, life restored to the dead, if you consider other men,¹¹ these are small things for a god to do.' We interrupted him before he raised further questions, the meeting was broken up, and we referred these points to one endowed with greater knowledge. This was

8 Cf. Letter 118 nn. 9,13.

9 Cf. Letter 118 n. 16.

10 Vergil, *Ec.* 4.61.

11 Such as the Prophets who preceded Christ, and the Apostles who followed Him, some of whom performed similar miracles.

to avoid any unconsidered probing into secret matters, or turning a harmless error into a guilty one. So now, Sir, with your universal reputation, you have the confession of our ignorance. You know what is wanted from your side. It is important for your good name that we learn the answers to what is asked. It is true that ignorance is tolerated in other priests without any discredit to divine worship, but, when one turns to Bishop Augustine, whatever happens not to be known needs only to be read. May the supreme Divinity keep your Reverence safe, truly holy lord and deservedly revered father.

136. Marcellinus¹ to my father, Augustine, greatly revered lord, worthy of my entire respect in the performance of my duties

The noble Volusian has read me a letter from your Beatitude—in fact, he read it to several people at my suggestion—and I was in great admiration of it, although I find admirable everything that you say. The grace of your divine speech, rising from your humility, easily wins the prize in the matter of giving pleasure. And it was especially pleasing because you hasten to support and strengthen a man's somewhat wavering footsteps by encouraging him to have a strong purpose for good. I have a daily discussion with him, as far as my strength and my poor ability allow, because I have been constrained by the request of his holy mother² to make an effort to greet him often, although he is kind enough on his side to return the courtesy. The receipt of your Reverence's letter made such an impression on the man, who was being drawn away from adherence to the faith

1 Cf. Letter. 128.

2 The older Melania.

by the influence of many—and there are plenty of them in this city—that, as he admitted himself, he would not have recoiled from the length of such a letter if he could have confided to your Beatitude every doubting thought he had. And, to the extent that you yourself will deign to agree, he has earnestly asked to have certain difficulties solved for him in that cultured and exact language of yours, and that shining splendor of Roman eloquence. The question has become a much-discussed one and the cleverness of those who defame the dispensation of the Lord's Incarnation is quite well known in this group. Because I trust that whatever you write in answer will be profitable to many in this group, I approach you as a petitioner, asking you to be so kind as to answer that point carefully, in which they falsely maintain that the Lord did no more than other men were able to do, and they bring up for our benefit their Apollonius,³ and Apuleius,⁴ and other men adept in magic, who, according to their claim, worked greater miracles.

But, that above-mentioned illustrious man said in the presence of several people that there were many questions which could fitly be added to this one, as I said before, except that he, on his side, had some regard for epistolary brevity. But he did not pass them over in silence, even though he would not write them, for he said that, even if an explanation of the Lord's Incarnation were given him today, it would still be hard to make plain to him why this God, who is pronounced the God of the Old Testament, should spurn the ancient sacrifices and delight in new ones. He insisted that a thing cannot be corrected unless it was proved to have been wrongly done before, or at least, that what was rightly

³ A famous impostor and magician of the 1st century, credited with many miraculous deeds.

⁴ Cf. Letter 102 n. 42.

done once should never be changed. He said it was wrong to change right things, largely because such useless action could ascribe fickleness to God, and he added that His preaching and doctrine were not adaptable to the customs of the state. This, indeed, is said by many, such, for instance, as His teaching that we should not return evil for evil to anyone, that we should turn the other cheek when anyone strikes us; that we should let go our cloak when anyone takes our coat; and, when anyone forces us to go with him, we should go twice as far;⁵ all of which he says is contrary to the laws of the state. For, who could allow anything to be taken from him by an enemy, or who would not wish to return evil, as the law of war allows, to the ravager of a Roman province? Your Reverence understands what can be said about the rest. Thus, he believes, even if he says nothing on this score, that all those points can be related to this same question, that at least to this extent it is evident that great evils befall the state when Christian rulers generally observe the Christian religion.

Consequently, as your Beatitude is so good as to agree with me in recognizing that, as the much-desired answer of your Holiness to all this will pass through many hands, it should be full in appearance and carefully worked out, a brilliant solution; especially as the excellent landlord and ruler of the countryside of Hippo was present when these questions were raised, and he praised your Holiness with sarcastic flattery, insisting that he had not been at all satisfied when these queries were made. So, then, in the midst of all this, I do not forget your promise; I insist on it, and I ask for the completion of works which will be unbelievably useful to the Church, especially at this time.

⁵ Rom. 12.17; Matt. 5.39-41.

137. *Augustine gives greeting in the Lord to the noble lord, his justly distinguished and excellent son, Volusian¹ (412)*

I have read your letter in which I saw a sort of sample of a lengthy dialogue compressed into a praiseworthy conciseness, so I ought to answer it without offering any excuses by way of delay. Fortunately, I happen to have a little respite from external affairs, so I have decided to spend my leisure in dictating your answer, and I have delayed as little as possible in the belief that it is not fair to put off someone who appeals to me when I had personally invited him to appeal. But who of us who dispense the grace of Christ as best we can would wish, after reading your words, that you should be instructed in Christian doctrine just enough to give you security in this life, which, as the divine Word is at pains to warn us, is very like a vapor which appears for a little while and straightway vanishes and disappears,² and not rather to enable you to attain to and lay hold on that salvation which is eternal, for the sake of which we are Christians? It is not worth while for us to instruct you merely to free you from error, for your mind and your gift of speech are so exceptional and so attractive that they ought to be helpful to others. And it is most opportune to defend the ministry of grace against the sloth and willful error of such as these, proud little minds who make no account of grace, who make a great show of their ability, but can do nothing either to cure their own faults or even to check them.

You ask, then, whether the Lord and Ruler of the universe filled the womb of the chaste virgin; whether that mother bore the long weariness of ten months, and nevertheless brought Him forth as a virgin, according to the usual method

¹ Cf. Letter 132.

² Cf. James 4.15.

of birth, and after this remained an inviolate virgin; whether He to whom the universe can scarcely be compared lies hid within the tiny body of a wailing infant; whether He endured the years of childhood, grew to be a youth, developed His strength into manhood; whether for so long a time that Ruler was absent from His throne while all the care of the world was transferred into one small body; then, whether He relaxed in sleep, was nourished by food, and was subject to all the feelings of mortals. You add that He gave no clear indication of such great majesty by any suitable signs, since the driving out of evil spirits, the cure of the sick and life restored to the dead, if we consider other men, are small things for a god to do.³ You write that this question was raised at a certain gathering of friends, by one of the many who were there, but you interrupted him before he raised further questions, that the meeting was broken up, and these points referred to one endowed with greater knowledge, to avoid any unconsidered probing into secret matters, or turning a harmless error into a guilty one.

Then you direct the purpose of your letter to me, and, after this confession of ignorance, you warn me what is wanted from my side. You add that it is important for my good name that you learn the answers to what is asked, because, whereas ignorance is tolerated in other priests without any discredit to divine worship, when you turn to me, a bishop, whatever happens not to be known needs only to be read. In the first place, then, I ask you to lay aside that opinion of me too easily taken for granted, to put off and give up that altogether too kind attitude toward me, and not to think better of me than of any other, if you really return my affection. But, Christian learning is so deep a study that I might have made some progress in it daily if I had tried to apply myself to it exclusively from my

³ A summary of Letter 135.

earliest childhood to extreme old age, spending on it all my time, all my effort, and a better gift of mind. I do not say that it is too difficult to attain to the knowledge necessary to salvation, but whoever remains firm in the faith, without which one cannot live religiously and uprightly, finds so many truths which have to be learned, shrouded in the manifold darkness of mystery, he finds such a depth of wisdom lying hidden, not only in the words in which the truths are expressed, but also in the truths themselves, which are to be known, that even the most advanced in years, the most penetrating in mind, the most ardent in zeal for learning, might find himself described by what the same Scripture says elsewhere; 'When a man hath done, then shall he begin.'⁴

But, why delay on this? Let us rather get to the point of what you ask. In the first place, I would have you know that Christian doctrine does not hold that God took on the flesh, in which He was born of the Virgin, in such wise as to abandon or lose His care of the government of the world, or to transfer this care, reduced and concentrated, so to speak, to that small body. That idea belongs to men who are not able to imagine any substance except what is corporeal, whether those substances be grosser, like water and earth, or finer, like air and light, but still corporeal. None of these can be wholly everywhere, since they are necessarily composed of numberless parts, some here and some there; however large or however small the substance may be, it occupies an amount of space, and it fills that space without being entire in any part of it. Consequently, it is a characteristic of corporeal substances alone to be condensed and rarefied, contracted and expanded, divided into small bits and enlarged into a great mass. The nature of the soul is very different from that of the body, and much more different is the nature of God who is the Creator of both body and soul.

⁴ Eccli. 18.6.

God cannot be said to fill the world as water or air or even light do, filling a smaller part of the world with a smaller part of Himself, and the same with a larger part. He knows how to be wholly everywhere without being confined to any place; He knows how to come without leaving the place where He was; He knows how to go away without abandoning the place to which He had come.

The human mind marvels at this, and, because it does not grasp it, perhaps does not believe it. Let it first examine and marvel at itself; let it lift itself out of the body for a little while, if it can, and rise above those things which it is wont to experience through the body and let it see itself what it is that uses the body. Perhaps it cannot do that, since a certain one said: 'It is a mark of great genius to withdraw the mind from the senses and turn thought from its customary course.'⁵ Let him, then, examine the very senses of the body somewhat more carefully than usual. Certainly, the senses of the body are fivefold; they cannot exist without either the body or the soul, because sensation is found only in what is living, and life comes to the body from the soul. Yet, we do not see or hear or use the other three senses without the bodily instruments which are, so to speak, their vessels and organs. Let the rational soul note this, and let it consider its bodily senses, not by means of the bodily senses, but by the mind itself and reason. Certainly, man cannot experience sensation unless he is alive, but he lives in the flesh until the two are parted by death. How, then, does the soul perceive things outside the flesh, since it lives only in the flesh? Are not the stars in heaven very far away from its flesh? And does it not see the sun in heaven? Or is seeing not a faculty of perception, although sight is pre-eminent among the five senses? Or perhaps it lives in heaven, also, because it perceives what is in heaven, and there can be

⁵ Cicero. *Tusculan Disputations* 1.16.38.

no sense-perception where there is no life? Or has it sense-perception beyond the range of its life, and, although it lives only in its own flesh, it also sees things contained in those places outside its own flesh, things which it touches by sight? Do you see how obscure a matter this is, even in the case of a sense as well known as sight is admitted to be? Take the case of hearing. This sense spreads outside the body in some way. Why do we say: 'It sounds outdoors,' if we do not hear where the sound is? Do we, then, on that account, live outside our flesh, or can we also experience sensation where we do not live, although sensation cannot exist without life?

The other three senses experience sensation within themselves, although, even so, there might be some doubt about smell. But there is no question about taste and touch, since the things we taste and touch can be experienced only in our flesh. Let us, then, pass over these three senses in this consideration. Sight and hearing raise a singular question: either how the soul perceives beyond its range of life, or how it lives where it does not exist. For, it does not exist except in its own flesh, but its perception extends beyond the flesh. Certainly, it perceives where it sees, because to see is to perceive; and it perceives where it hears, because to hear is to perceive. Therefore, its life either extends that far, and by this very fact it exists there, too, or its perception extends beyond its range of life, or its life is found even where it does not also exist. All these are strange thoughts; none of them can be asserted without a certain amount of absurdity. And what we are speaking of is a sense-organ destined to die. What, then, is the nature of the soul itself, outside the range of bodily sensation, that is, in the mind by which it considers these ideas? For, it does not use the bodily senses to form an opinion of those same bodily senses. And we think that something impossible to believe is told us about the omnipotence of God, when we are told that the Word of

God, by whom all things were made,⁶ took flesh from a virgin and appeared to mortal senses without destroying His immortality or infringing on His eternity, or diminishing His power, or neglecting the government of the world, or leaving the bosom of the Father, where He is intimately with Him and in Him!

You must understand the Word of God, by whom all things were made, without thinking that anything of Him passes away or changes from future to past. He remains as He is and He is everywhere totally present. But He comes when He reveals Himself and goes away when He is hidden. However, He is present whether He is revealed or hidden, as light is present to the eyes of one who sees as well as of one who is blind, but it is present to him who sees as something actual, while to the blind it is something missing. So, also, the sound of the voice is present to ears that hear; it is also present to deaf ears: to the former it is actual, from the latter it is hidden. What more strange than what happens when our voices utter words in obviously rapid sequence? For, when we speak, there is no chance for even a second syllable until the first has stopped sounding, yet, if one hearer is present, he hears all that we say; and if two are present, both hear the same whole sound which each one hears; and if a silent crowd hears it, they do not divide the sounds among them by particles as if it were food, but the whole sound is heard wholly by all and by each. So, then, is it harder to believe that the eternal Word of God should have the same effect on material things as the word of a man has on human ears, and that the Word should be wholly present everywhere, as the sound is heard entirely by each one?

Therefore, we need have no fear about that tiny body of infancy, that so great a God should seem to be confined in it. God's greatness is not in mass but in power; He has

⁶ John 1.1,3.

given a greater sense of foresight to tiny ants and bees than to asses and camels; He creates the immense spread of the fig tree from the smallest seed, while many much smaller things grow from much larger seeds; He has endowed the minute pupil of the eye with the power of sight by which in an instant it sweeps across almost half the sky; He has centered all the senses in one spot of the brain, and from there sends out their fivefold activity; He radiates the life-giving impulse through all the parts of the body from the heart, an organ of insignificant size: in these and other like instances, He who is not small in small things produces great things from the least. For, that very greatness of His power, which feels no narrowness in narrow quarters, enriched the Virgin's womb, not by an externally caused but by an intrinsic childbirth; that power took to itself a rational soul and thereby also a human body, and chose to better all mankind without suffering any diminution itself, deigning to take the name of humanity from man, while granting him a share in the divinity. That same power brought forth the body of the infant from the inviolate virginal womb of the mother, as afterward the Body of the Man penetrated closed doors.⁷ It will not be wondered at if an explanation is asked of this; it will not be remarkable if an example is demanded. Let us grant that God can do something which we confess we cannot fathom. In such matters the whole explanation of the deed is in the power of the doer.

Turning, now, to that fact of his relaxing in sleep and being nourished by food, and experiencing all human feelings: it proves to men that He took on human nature, He did not destroy it. Behold, that is how it happened, yet certain heretics, by excessive admiration and praise of His power, refuse to acknowledge the human nature which is undoubt-

⁷ John 20.19,26.

edly His. Herein is all the worth of grace, by which He saves those who believe, containing in itself deep treasures of wisdom and knowledge,⁸ and steeping in faith the minds which it draws to the eternal contemplation of unchangeable truth. Suppose the omnipotent had created His manhood by forming it otherwise than in a mother's womb, and had presented Himself suddenly to our sight; suppose He had not passed through the stages from childhood to youth, had taken no food, no sleep: would He not have given ground for the erroneous opinion which believed that He had not really become man? And by doing everything miraculously, would He not have obscured the effect of His mercy? But now He has appeared as Mediator between God and men, in such wise as to join both natures in the unity of one Person, and has both raised the commonplace to the heights of the uncommon and brought down the uncommon to the commonplace.

What wonders does God not perform in the activities of created life, and how commonplace they have become through daily usage! Again, how many customary things are trampled under foot which would fill us with awe, if we considered them carefully! Take the force which is found in seeds: who can grasp in his thought or describe in language their numbers, their urge to live and grow, their hidden strength, their power to unfold their littleness into something great? He, then, who in the world of nature does not need seeds to make seeds, did not need seed to make himself a human body; He who, without any change in Himself, has woven the course of centuries by means of change submitted His Body to the sequence of time and the limitations of age. What began outside of time took growth in the course of time, but in the beginning the Word by whom all time was made chose the time when He was to

8 Col. 2.3.

take flesh; He did not wait for the time that He might become flesh, for, in truth, it was man who drew near to God, not God who went far off from Himself.

But there are some who request an explanation of how God is joined to man so as to become the single person of Christ, as if they themselves could explain something that happens every day, namely, how the soul is joined to the body so as to form the single person of a man. For, as the soul makes use of the body in a single person to form a man, so God makes use of man in a single Person to form Christ. In the former person there is a mingling of soul and body; in the latter Person there is a mingling of God and man; but the hearer must abstract from the property of material substance by which two liquids are usually so mingled that neither retains its separate character, although among such substances, light mingled with air remains unchanged. Therefore, the person of man is a mingling of soul and body, but the Person of Christ is a mingling of God and man, for, when the Word of God is joined to a soul which has a body, it takes on both the soul and the body at once. The one process happens daily in order to beget men; the other happened once to set men free. However, it ought to be easier to believe in the intermingling of two incorporeal things than of one incorporeal and the other corporeal. For, if the soul is not deceived about its own nature, it grasps the fact that it is incorporeal, but the Word of God is much more incorporeal, and for this reason it ought to be easier to believe in the intermingling of the Word of God and a soul than of a soul and a body. The one truth we experience in ourselves; the other we are bidden to believe in Christ. But, if we were ordered to believe both these truths, and they were both equally outside our experience, which of them would we be more ready to believe? Granted that the term mingling or intermingling is

not unworthily taken from the usage of corporeal things of far different nature and origin, would we not admit that it would be easier for two incorporeal things to be mingled than for one corporeal and the other incorporeal?

Therefore, the Word of God and the same Son of God, co-eternal with the Father, and the same power and wisdom of God,⁹ reaching mightily from the lofty end of rational creation to the lowly end of material creation, and ordering all things sweetly,¹⁰ present and hidden, nowhere confined, nowhere divided, nowhere extended, but everywhere wholly present without physical bulk, in a far other mode than that in which He is present to the rest of creation; this Word took on human nature, and thereby became the one Jesus Christ, Mediator between God and men,¹¹ equal to the Father in His divinity, less than the Father according to the flesh, that is, as man; unchangeably immortal according to His divinity which is equal to the Father, but likewise subject to change and death according to the weakness derived from us. In this same Christ, at the time which He had recognized as most fitting, and had ordained before time was, there came to men a Master and helper that we might gain eternal salvation. He was a Master, indeed, whose authority, manifested here in the flesh, was to confirm those vital truths, previously spoken not only by the holy Prophets, whose utterances were wholly true, but even by the philosophers and the very poets and authors of various kinds of works—and who doubts that they mingled many of their truths with falsehood?—and even before He became man He was present to all who could be sharers of His truth, for the sake of those who were not able to penetrate into the depths of truth and to distinguish what truth was. But,

9 1 Col. 1.24.

10 Wisd. 8.1.

11 1 Tim. 2.5.

most of all, since men generally in their intense longing for the divinity thought that God was to be approached through the powers of heaven, which they imagined to be gods, and through the various rites of forbidden and sacrilegious worship, carried out with more pride than piety—and thus the demons, through their kinship with pride, substitute themselves for the holy angels—by the example of His Incarnation He led man to know that whereas they had been trying to approach Him through subordinate beings, as though He were afar off, He was so close to their affectionate desire that He condescended to become man and to be united to him. He did this in such manner that the whole of man was thus joined to Him, as the soul is to the body, but without the changeableness of matter, into which God is not changed, but which we see present in the body and the soul. But, He is our help, because, without the grace of faith which comes from Him, no one can overcome his sinful lusts, or be cleansed by the remission and pardon of the remains of sin which he has not overcome. What difference, then, does it make to His teaching if some utterly ignorant person or some obscure and insignificant woman does not believe in the immortality of the soul and the reality of life after death? Once long ago, when the Syrian Pherecydes had discussed this point with the Greeks, he turned Pythagoras of Samos from an athlete into a philosopher, so impressed was he by the novelty of that argument.¹² But, as Vergil said, and we all see: 'The Assyrian balm grows commonly everywhere.'¹³ However, regarding the assistance of grace, which is in Christ, He

12 Cicero, *Tusc. Disp.* 1.16.38. Pherecydes (c. 600 B.C.), a native of the island of Scyros, said to have been the first to compose a theogony in prose, and to treat of the immortality of the soul. Pythagoras, his disciple, taught the doctrine of transmigration of souls.

13 Vergil, *Ec.* 4.25. It was to be one of the signs of the Golden Age that plants producing precious perfumes would grow freely everywhere.

is absolutely 'the leader who will free the earth from endless fear, if there still remain any unredeemed traces of our sin.'¹⁴

'But,' they say, 'no clear indication of such great majesty was manifested by suitable signs, since the driving out of evil spirits, the cure of the sick, life restored to the dead, if other men are considered, are small things for a god to do.'¹⁵ We agree, also, that the Prophets performed such deeds. Among these signs, what more arresting than to give life to the dead? Elias did this,¹⁶ Eliseus did this,¹⁷ but as far as the miracles of magicians are concerned, whether they raised the dead to life is something for those to look to who try to prove that Apuleius, defending himself vigorously against the charge of practising magic arts, was not a subject of blame but of praise.¹⁸ We read that the magicians of the Egyptians were very skilled in those arts, but they were outdone by Moses, the servant of God, for, when they performed certain wonders by their forbidden arts, he overturned all their trickery by simply calling on God.¹⁹ But Moses and the other truthful Prophets foretold the Lord Christ and gave Him great glory, and they prophesied His coming, not as one like themselves, or one not superior to them in the same power of miracles, but as the supreme Lord God of all, become man for the sake of man. The reason why He willed to perform such deeds Himself was that He might not be inconsistent in not doing personally what He had done through men. But, over and above that, He needed to perform deeds proper to Himself: to be born of a virgin, to rise from the dead, to ascend into heaven. If anyone thinks

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 4.13,14.

¹⁵ Quoted from Letter 135.

¹⁶ 3 Kings 17.17-22.

¹⁷ 4 Kings 4.18-35.

¹⁸ Here they were caught on a dilemma: if Apuleius denied the practice of magic and they praised him for it, they could not claim that by magic he had raised the dead.

¹⁹ Exod. 7-8.

this is too little for a god to do, I do not know what more he could expect.

For my part, I think that such deeds are demanded of Him as anyone bearing the burden of manhood ought not²⁰ to do. For, 'in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and all things were made by Him.'²¹ Should He, then, after becoming man, have made another world, so that we might believe that He was the one by whom the world was made? But it would not have been possible for a greater world, or one equal to this one, to be created in this world, and if He had made a lesser world, inferior to this one, it would likewise have been claimed to be too little for a god to do. Therefore, as it was not fitting for Him to make a new world, He did new things in the world. For a man born of a virgin, raised from the dead to eternal life, and exalted above the heavens is perhaps a more mighty achievement than a world. At this point, they probably reply that they do not believe this was done. What, then, are you to do with men who despise lesser marvels and do not believe in greater ones? They believe that life has been restored to the dead because others have done it, and it is beneath a god to do it, but they do not believe that a fitting body was created from a virgin and raised up from the dead to eternal life above the skies. because no one has done that, and it does befit a god to do it! Accordingly, 'Whatever each one believes is easy' not 'to do,' but to comprehend, 'he accepts readily, but anything beyond that he regards as fictitious and false.'²² Do not be like them, please.

These points are widely argued, and all the ramifications

20 The negative is not found in the Mss., but is supplied by the editors, and is required by the sense.

21 John 1.1.3.

22 Sallust, *Catiline* 3.2. The words 'not' and 'but to comprehend' are added by Augustine to the original quotation.

of such important questions have been laid open, after examination and discussion. But it is faith that opens the approach to them for the intellect, and unbelief that closes it. Who would not be moved to believe by the impressive order of creation from its beginning, by the interlocking of time, giving credibility to the past by the present, giving authenticity to earlier happenings by later ones, and to ancient events by those more recent? One man,²³ endowed with the most faithful love of God, is chosen from the nation of the Chaldeans; to him are revealed the divine promises, to be fulfilled in these latest times, after a long stretch of ages; it is foretold that in his seed all nations are to receive the blessing. Thus, the old man, worshiper of the one true God, creator of the universe, begot a son of a wife whom age and barrenness had deprived of the hope of bearing children. Of him a most numerous people was generated; it increased in Egypt, whither a divine dispensation, multiplying promise and fulfillment, had led that tribe from eastern lands. A strong nation was led out from the slavery of Egypt in the midst of dread signs and wonders; was led into the land of promise, after the expulsion of its impious inhabitants; was established as a kingdom and made great.²⁴ Later, as sin prevailed with daring sacrilege, this race, too, often offended God, who had bestowed such benefits on it, was scourged by various misfortunes and consoled by successes, until it was brought to the time of the Incarnation and Revelation of Christ. All the promises made to that people, all the prophecies, the priesthoods, the sacrifices, the temple, and all their sacred rites had announced this Christ the Word of God, the Son of God, the God about to come in the flesh, to die, to rise again, to ascend into heaven, to possess by His all-powerful name people dedicated to Him in all nations, to

²³ Abraham; cf. Gen. 12.1-3; 18.18.

²⁴ Exod. 13.17ff.

grant remission of sin and eternal salvation to those who believe.

Christ came, and in His birth, life, deeds, words, sufferings, death, resurrection, ascension all the pronouncements of the Prophets are fulfilled. He sends the Holy Spirit,²⁵ He fills the faithful gathered together in a house and awaiting this same promise with prayer and longing. They are filled with the Holy Spirit and they suddenly speak with the tongues of all nations; they confidently attack error; they preach the life-giving truth; they exhort to repentance of past sinful life; they promise pardon by divine grace. Their preaching of love of God and true worship is followed by fitting signs and wonders. The hatred of unbelief is roused against them; they bear the sufferings foretold; they hope for the promises; they teach what is enjoined. Though few in number, they are spread over the world; with marvellous ease they convert whole peoples; they grow in the midst of enemies; they increase under persecution; and by the pressure of affliction they are scattered to the ends of the earth. Though once the most ignorant, the most lowly, the fewest in number, they become learned, they are ennobled, their numbers are multiplied. The most famous minds, the most cultured speech, the admirable skill of the brilliant, the eloquent and the learned are brought under the yoke of Christ, and turned to preaching the way of love of God and salvation. Amid varying failures and successes in their work they practise endurance and watchful self-control; in a world approaching its end²⁶ and declaring by its weariness that the last age is at hand, they await with all the greater confidence—because this, too, has been foretold—the eternal happiness of the heavenly City. And in the midst of all this, the unbelief of impious

²⁵ Acts 2.2,4.

²⁶ In the fifth century, with barbarians thundering at the gates of Rome, it must have seemed to the Roman world that the end of all things was at hand.

peoples rages against the Church of Christ, but she overcomes them by endurance and by opposing an unshaken faith to the cruelty of her attackers. When the sacrifice now revealed by truth, which had long been veiled in mysterious promises, had displaced those other sacrifices by which this one was prefigured, they were abolished by the destruction of the Temple itself. The very Jewish race, cast off because of its unbelief, was driven out from its home and scattered throughout the world, so that it might carry the sacred Books everywhere; thus the testimony of the prophecy by which Christ and His Church were foretold was published abroad by His very enemies, thereby preventing anyone from thinking that, when the time of fulfillment had come, this testimony was invented by us. In fact, it was foretold of them that they would not believe. The temples and statues of demons and their sacrilegious worship were little by little, each in turn, destroyed, according to the prophetic utterances. Heresies against the Name of Christ, under cover even of the Name of Christ, swarm into existence, as they were foretold, in order to strengthen the doctrine of our holy religion. As all these predictions can be read, so their fulfillment can be seen, and of the many great ones which remain the fulfillment is awaited. To sum up, what mind, longing for eternity, and impressed by the brevity of this life, could resist the light and completeness of this divine authority?

What arguments, what works of any philosophers, what laws of any states can be compared in any way with the two commandments on which Christ says the whole Law and the Prophets depend?²⁷ 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with thy whole mind; and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.'²⁸ Herein is natural science, since all the causes of all natures

²⁷ Matt. 22.40.

²⁸ Matt. 22.37-39.

are found in God, the Creator; herein is ethics, since the good and honorable life is formed in no other way than by loving what ought to be loved as it ought to be loved, that is, God and our neighbor; herein is logic, since there is no other truth and light for the rational mind than God; herein is the praiseworthy security of the state, for the best city is erected and safeguarded on no other foundation than the bond of faith and unbreakable concord. This happens when the common good is loved, when God is the highest and truest good, and when men love each other most sincerely because they love themselves for the sake of Him from whom they cannot hide the true sentiment of their hearts.

The very language in which Holy Scripture is expressed is easy for all, although understood by very few. In its easily understood parts it speaks to the heart of unlearned and learned like a familiar friend who uses no subterfuge, but, in those truths which it veils in mystery, it does not raise itself aloft with proud speech. Hence, the backward and untutored mind dares to draw near to it as a poor man to a rich one, because it invites all in simple language, and feeds their minds with its teaching in plain words, while training them in the truth by its hidden message, having the same effect in both the obvious and the obscure. But, lest the obvious should cause disgust, the hidden truths arouse longing; longing brings on certain renewal; renewal brings sweet inner knowledge. By these means depraved minds are set right, small ones are nourished, great ones are filled with delight. The mind which is an enemy to this teaching is the one that errs in not knowing its power to save, or, in its sickness, hates its curative power.

You see what a lengthy letter I have written. If, then, some difficulty disturbs you, and you set great store on having it thoroughly worked out between us, do not let the usual length of ordinary letters constrain you, as if it had to be

observed, because you know quite well what long letters the ancients wrote when they were dealing with something that could not be explained in a few words. And, if some writers had one way and others another of dealing with letters, the precedent of our own authors can be set before us as something more worthy of imitation. Take the case of the apostolic letters, or of those writers who have made commentaries on the divine teachings, and do not be backward in either proposing many objections if many disturb you, or in discussing what you ask at some length, so that, as far as may be possible with minds such as ours are, there may not remain the least cloud of doubt to darken the light of truth.

I know that your Excellency suffers from the extremely obstinate contradictions of certain people who think, or wish others to think, that Christian teaching is not conducive to the welfare of the state, and their reason is that they prefer to safeguard the state by tolerating crime rather than by strengthening virtue. But God does not act as a mortal king or ruler of a state acts, in leaving unpunished offenses committed by everybody. His mercy and grace, preached to men by the Man, Christ; imparted by God and the Son of God, the same Christ, do not forsake those who live by faith in Him and who worship Him devoutly; whether they bear the evils of this life patiently and bravely, or make use of His good gifts charitably and temperately; in both cases they will receive their reward in the heavenly and divine City. There we shall no longer have to bear painful trials or curb our passions with laborious effort, but there we shall possess the pure love of God and neighbor, without any trouble, and with perfect freedom. May the most merciful power of God keep you safe and happy, noble lord, justly distinguished and excellent son. I

dutifully greet your holy mother,²⁹ most worthy to be honored in Christ. May God hear her prayers for you as you deserve. My holy brother and fellow bishop, Possidius,³⁰ gives friendly greeting to your Excellency.

138. Augustine gives greeting in the Lord to Marcellinus,¹ excellent and justly distinguished lord, and his very dear and much-cherished son (412)

In my answer to Volusian,² that distinguished and eloquent man, most dear to us, I felt the need of dealing with the matter at as great length as he had thought fit to do in his question. But, in those points in your letter which you sent me for analysis and solution, whether they were raised or repeated by him or by others, I thought it would be better to analyze and solve them according to my ability and then send them to you, as far as they can be thus handled in a conversation by letter, without having to deal with them in the form of treatises. Thus, if you think well—since you have experience of their doings in daily debates—you may have this letter read to them. But, if these words do not sufficiently impress ears not attuned to faith and piety, let us first plan out together what you think will impress them, and then send them what we have worked out, for, if their taste is still fastidious and superficial, there are many ways by which, perhaps, they may sometime be convinced, either by a fuller or more acute reasoning, or at least by an authority which they would think it improper to refuse to recognize.

29 Cf. Letter 136 n. 2.

30 Bishop of Calama, Augustine's biographer. Cf. Letter 101.

1 Cf. Letter 136, to which this is an answer.

2 Cf. Letter 137.

So, then, you wrote in your letter that certain ones were disturbed by the question: 'Why God who is pronounced the God of the Old Testament should spurn the ancient sacrifices and delight in new ones. They insist that a thing cannot be corrected unless it was proved to have been wrongly done before, or at least that what was rightly done once should never be changed. For, they say it is wrong to change things.'³ I have copied these words from your letter into mine. If I were inclined to answer them in detail, I should more quickly run out of time than out of examples, showing how the world of nature itself, and human works as well, change by a regular method, according to the occurrence of the seasons, yet the same method by which they change is not changeable. Let me instance a few examples, so that your attention, roused by them, may run attentively over many similar ones. Does not summer follow winter, with a gradual increase of heat? Childhood, never to return, gives place to youth; vigorous manhood, doomed not to last, succeeds to youth; old age, putting an end to vigorous manhood, is itself ended by death. All these are changes, yet the method of Divine Providence by which they are made to change does not change. When the farmer gives one sort of orders in the summer and another in the winter, I do not suppose that any change is made in the method of agriculture. And when someone who has slept at night rises in the morning, he has not changed the pattern of his life. The master gave a different task to the youth from the one assigned to the boy; therefore, learning is constant though the teaching change; itself unchanged, it changes its instruction.

Vindician, a great physician of our times, when consulted by a certain patient, ordered the remedy for his illness which seemed right at that time; when it had been applied, the cure followed. But, several years later, when the same bodily

³ Quoted from Letter 136.

distemper befell him, he thought fit to apply the same remedy, and grew worse. Astonished, he went back to the doctor and described his case, but the doctor said very sharply: 'You suffered the bad effect of the medicine because I had not ordered it.' As a result, those who heard him and knew the man but slightly thought that he was not relying on his medical skill, but on some unlawful power. Questioned by those of the astonished bystanders who had the opportunity, he disclosed what they had not known, namely, that he would not have prescribed that remedy for that patient at that age. Thus, without any change in method or medical skill, the effect is attained by changing what needs change according to the difference brought about by time.

Therefore, it is not true to say that a thing rightly done once should not be changed. Obviously, right reason demands a change in what was right to do at some earlier time, if the time circumstance is changed, so, when these objectors say it is not right to make a change, truth answers with a shout that it is not right not to make a change, because then it will be right both ways, if the change accords with the variation in time. This may happen, too, with different persons at the same time, so that 'One may, the other may not do something without harm, the difference lying not in the deed but in the doer.'⁴ Similarly, in the case of one and the same person at different times, it may be proper to do something now but not at another time, the difference lying not in the doer but in the time of the deed.

Anyone can see what a wide application this principle has, if he relies on and does not fail to observe the difference between beauty and fitness, which is spread far and wide, so to speak, in the generality of things. For, beauty is looked upon and praised for its own sake, and its contrary is ugliness and unsightliness. But fitness, whose opposite is unfitness,

⁴ Terence, *Ad.* 824.25.

depends on something else, and is, in a sense, fastened to it; it is not prized for its own value, but for that to which it is joined. Doubtless, the words 'suitable' and 'unsuitable' are synonyms, or are so considered. Let us now apply what we said before to this point under discussion. The sacrifice which God had commanded was fitting in those early times, but now it is not so. Therefore, He prescribed another one, fitting for this age, since He knew much better than man what is suitably adapted to each age, and, being the unchangeable Creator as well as Ruler of the world of change, He knows as well what and when to give, to add to, to take away, to withdraw, to increase, or to diminish, until the beauty of the entire world, of which the individual parts are suitable each for its own time, swells, as it were, into a mighty song of some unutterable musician, and from thence the true adorers of God rise to the eternal contemplation of His face, even in the time of faith.

But those who think that God commands these things for His own profit or pleasure are wrong, and they deserve to be puzzled at God's changing things as if His pleasure changed, ordering one kind of sacrifice to be offered to Him at that early period and another at this time. It is not that way. God commands nothing for His own advantage, but for the benefit of the one on whom the commandment rests. Therefore, that man is a true master who does not need his slave, but whose slave needs him. Thus, in the part of Scripture which is called the Old Testament, and at that time when those sacrifices were still offered which are not offered now, this was said: 'I have said to the Lord, thou art my God for thou hast no need of my goods.'⁵ Similarly, God has no need of those sacrifices, nor does He ever need any, but they are signs of divinely bestowed favors, intended either to endow the mind with virtues or to help in the attaining of eternal

5 Ps. 15.2.

salvation. Their observance and performance are exercises of devotion, useful to us, not to God.

It would take too long to discuss adequately the variety of signs which are called sacraments when they are applied to divine things. Therefore, as God is not changeable because morning is different from evening, or this happens one month and that another, or things are not the same this year as they were last, so God is not changeable because in the earlier Book He ordered one kind of offering to be made to Him, and in the later one another, in order to give fitting meaning to the saving doctrine of religion in varying times, without any variation in Himself. Those who are troubled by these changes should know that this has long been a part of the divine plan, and when the new rites were instituted there was no question of the old ones having suddenly become displeasing, as if by a change of will, but that this has long ago been determined and ordained by the very wisdom of God, to whom the same Scripture says, speaking of greater changes in nature: 'Thou shalt change them and they shall be changed, but thou art the self same.'⁶ Let these be instructed that the change of ceremonial from the Old to the New Testament had also been foretold by prophetic utterances. Thus they will see, if they are able, that what is new in time is not new with Him, since He created time, and, timeless Himself, contains all things which He allots to all the several periods of time according to their diversity. For, in that psalm from which I quoted a verse to show that God has no need of our sacrifices, to whom it is said: 'I said to the Lord: Thou art my God for thou hast no need of my goods,' we read a little further along, of the person of Christ: 'I will not gather together their meetings for blood-offerings,'⁷ that is, for animal victims, for which the meetings of the Jews used to be

⁶ Ps. 101.27,28.

⁷ Ps. 15.2-4.

gathered together. Elsewhere it says: 'I will not take calves out of thy house, nor he-goats out of thy flocks,'⁸ and another Prophet says: 'Behold the days shall come, saith the Lord, and I shall strengthen upon the house of Jacob a new covenant, not as the covenant which I disposed to their fathers when I led them out of the land of Egypt.'⁹ There are many other proofs of this matter, showing by prophecy that God would do this, but it would take too long for me to list them now.

If it is sufficiently clear that what was rightly instituted at one time can equally rightly be changed at another time by the action of the changer without any change in His plan and that this plan belongs to a reasonable and intelligent being in a state of existence where all happenings are viewed simultaneously without the limitations of time, although they cannot happen simultaneously in time because time is not simultaneous. Someone may possibly expect to learn from us the causes of this same change, but you know what a lengthy performance that would be. However, it is possible to say in a few words what will probably satisfy a man of keen understanding, that it was fitting for Christ before His coming to be foretold by certain symbolic ceremonies, but after His coming He was to be announced by others, just as, when we speak, the difference of time obliges us to change our expressions, since 'foretell' is not the same as 'announce,' and 'before His coming' is different from 'after His coming.'

Now let us see what is the nature of the next point in your letter. You added that they say that Christ's preaching and doctrine are not adaptable in any way to the customs of the state, and they give as an example the precept that we are not to return evil for evil to anyone; that we should turn the other cheek when anyone strikes us; that we should let go

⁸ Ps. 49.9.

⁹ Jer. 38.31,32 (Septuagint).

our cloak when anyone takes our coat; and when anyone forces us to go with him we should go twice as far: all of which things are contrary to the customs of the state. 'For who,' they say, 'could allow anything to be taken from him by an enemy, or who would not wish to return evil, as the law of war allows, to the ravager of a Roman province?'¹⁰ I might find it a laborious task to refute these and other such words of critics, or of men who say things by way of inquiry rather than of criticism, if it were not that this discussion is directed to men of culture and education. So, what use is it for me to labor the point; rather, why not ask them how those early patriots were able to govern and enlarge the state which they had changed from a small, poor one to a great, rich one,¹¹ when 'they preferred to pardon the wrongs they had suffered rather than avenge them?'¹² How could Cicero, praising the conduct of Caesar as ruler of the state, say that he never forgot anything but wrongs?¹³ He said this either as high praise or as high flattery: if it was praise, he knew that Caesar was like that; if it was flattery, he was showing that the ruler of a state ought to be such as he falsely described him. But, what is the meaning of not returning evil for evil, if it is not abhorrence of the passion of revenge; and what is the meaning of preferring to pardon wrongs suffered rather than avenge them, if it is not forgetfulness of wrongs?

When men read of these traits in their authors, they publish and applaud them; such conduct as is described and praised seems to them worthy of the beginning of a state which was to rule over so many nations, as when they say that 'they preferred to pardon wrongs suffered rather than avenge them.' But, when they read the command of divine authority that evil is not to be returned for evil, when this

¹⁰ Quoted from Letter 136.

¹¹ Sallust, *Cat.* 52.19.

¹² *Ibid.* 9.5.

¹³ Cicero, *Pro Lig.* 12.35.

advice is preached from the pulpit to congregations of people, in these universal schools of both sexes and of every age and rank, religion is charged with being an enemy of the state. If this teaching had been heard as it deserved to be, it would have founded, sanctified, strengthened, and enlarged the state very much more successfully than Romulus, Numa, Brutus and those other famous men of Roman birth did.¹⁴ For, what is the commonwealth if not the common property? Therefore, the common property is the property of the state. And what is the state but the generality of men united by the bond of common agreement? In their authors we read: 'In a short time a scattered and wandering mob became a state by mutual agreement.'¹⁵ But, indeed, what precept of agreement did they ever decree to be read in their temples, when they were unhappily obliged to find out how they could worship gods without offense to any of them, when these disagreed among themselves? For, if they chose to imitate them in their discord, their state was likely to fall apart, by the breaking of the bond of agreement, so that, as their morals declined and lost their purity, they began to be involved in civil war.

But, who is so ill-versed in our religion, or so deaf, as not to know the great precepts of agreement, not worked out by human arguments but written by divine authority, which are read in the Churches of Christ? To this teaching those precepts belong which look rather to action than to learning: to turn the other cheek to the striker; to give the coat to him who tries to take away the cloak; to make a double journey when forced to go with anyone.¹⁶ Thus it happens that the evil man is overcome by the good one, or, rather, evil is

14 Romulus, founder and first king of Rome; Numa Pompilius, second king of Rome, who gave the Romans their religious institutions; Brutus, founder of the Roman republic.

15 Cicero, *De re publica*, frag. 1.1.25.39.40.

16 Matt. 5.39-41.

overcome by good¹⁷ in the evil man, and the man is set free, not from an exterior foreign evil, but from an interior, personal one, by which he is more grievously and ruinously laid waste than he would be by the inhumanity of any enemy from without. Therefore, he overcomes evil by good who suffers the loss of temporal goods with patience, in order to show how far these goods are to be despised for the sake of faith and justice. And the one who becomes evil by loving these goods to excess, and who does the wrong, is to learn from the very one to whom he did the wrong what kinds of goods these are that made him do the wrong, and so he is to be brought to repentance and to agreement—than which nothing is more useful to the state—overcome by the goodness of his victim rather than by the strength of an avenger. The right time for this to be done is when it seems likely to benefit the one for whose sake it is done, in order to bring about correction and a return to agreement. And this certainly is the intention one must have when this remedy is applied to correct and win over the offender, and, in a sense, to cure and restore him to sanity, and it must be done even if the outcome is otherwise and he refuses to accept either correction or peace-making.

Otherwise, if we notice the words and imagine that they are to be kept literally, we might suppose the right cheek is not to be offered if the left is struck, since it says: 'If one strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him also the left.'¹⁸ The left is much more likely to be struck, because it is easier to strike a blow with the right hand. But it is usually understood as if it were said: If anyone makes an attempt on your best possessions, give him your less precious ones, too; otherwise, you might show vengeance rather than patience, and thereby despise eternal goods in favor of temporal ones, whereas

¹⁷ Rom. 12.21.

¹⁸ Cf. Matt. 5.39.

temporal goods are to be despised in favor of eternal ones, as things on the left are to be despised in favor of those on the right. This has always been the aim of the holy martyrs. A final just vengeance is looked for, that is, the last supreme judgment, only when no chance of correction remains. But, now, we must be on our guard, more than anything else, not to lose patience in our eagerness to be justified, for patience is to be more highly prized than anything an enemy can take from us against our will. Another Evangelist, expressing the same thought, makes no mention of right cheek, but says, 'the other cheek,'¹⁹ and in order to make this expression 'other' more intelligible, he simply recommends the same patience. Therefore, an upright and devout man ought to bear with patience the malice of those whom he seeks to make good, in order to increase the number of the good rather than add himself to the number of the bad.

Finally, those precepts refer rather to the interior disposition of the heart than to the act which appears exteriorly, and they enjoin on us to preserve patience and kindly feeling in the hidden places of the soul, revealing them openly when it seems likely to be beneficial to those whose welfare we seek. This is clearly shown in the case of the Lord Christ Himself, a unique model of patience, who was struck on the face and answered: 'If I have spoken evil, give testimony of the evil, but if well, why strikest thou me?'²⁰ If we look at the words literally, He obviously did not fulfill His own precept, for He did not offer His other cheek to the striker; on the contrary, He forbade the one who did it to augment the wrong, yet He came prepared not only to be struck on the face, but even to die on the cross for those from whom He suffered these wrongs, and when He hung on the cross He prayed for them: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not

¹⁹ Luke 6.29.

²⁰ John 18.23.

what they do.’²¹ The Apostle Paul apparently did not keep the command of his Lord and Master either, when he was also struck on the face, and said to the chief priest: ‘God shall strike thee, thou whited wall. Thou sittest to judge me according to the law, and contrary to the law, thou commandest me to be struck.’²² And when the bystanders said: ‘Dost thou revile the high priest?’²³ he chose to give them a warning by speaking in mockery, so that those who were wise might understand that the whited wall, that is, the hypocrisy of the Jewish priesthood, had been destroyed at the coming of Christ; for he said: ‘I knew not, brethren, that he is the high priest, for it is written: Thou shalt not speak evil of the prince of thy people.’²⁴ Now, undoubtedly, since he had grown up among those same people and had there been instructed in the Law, he could not but know that that person was the high priest, nor could he, in any wise, deceive those to whom he was known into believing that he did not know.

Therefore, those precepts of patience are always to be preserved in the heart, to keep it in readiness, and those kindly feelings which keep us from returning evil for evil are always to be developed in the will. But, we often have to act with a sort of kindly harshness, when we are trying to make unwilling souls yield, because we have to consider their welfare rather than their inclination, and this sort of thing has been lavishly praised in their literature describing the beginnings of the state. For, in punishing a son, however harshly, a father’s love is certainly not cast aside, yet what he does not want, and what makes him suffer, happens because it appears that he can be cured only by unwilling suffering. Thus, if the earthly state observes those Christian teachings,

²¹ Luke 23.34.

²² Acts 23.3.

²³ Acts 23.4.

²⁴ Acts 23.5; Exod. 22.28.

even war will not be waged without kindness, and it will be easier for a society whose peace is based on piety and justice to take thought for the conquered. He whose freedom to do wrong is taken away suffers a useful form of restraint, since nothing is more unfortunate than the good fortune of sinners, who grow bold by not being punished—a penalty in itself—and whose evil will is strengthened by the enemy within. But the depraved and distorted hearts of men esteem human fortunes happy when the splendor of buildings is in evidence, and the collapse of souls is not noticed; when magnificent theatres are erected, and the foundations of virtue are undermined; when the madness of extravagance is glorified, and the works of mercy are scoffed at; when actors live in luxury at the expense of the excessively wealthy, and the poor scarcely have the necessities of life; when God, who thunders against this public evil through the public voices of His doctrine, is blasphemed by impious nations, and the kind of gods sought after are those whose worship is attended by that theatrical degradation of body and soul. If God permits these abuses to flourish, it is a sign of His greater wrath; if He lets them go unpunished, that is a very deadly punishment. But, when He withdraws the sustenance of vice and impoverishes the riches of lust, He opposes them in mercy, for it would be a sign of mercy—if that were possible—that even wars should be waged by the good, in order to curb licentious passions by destroying those vices which should have been rooted out and suppressed by the rightful government.

If Christian practice condemned war in general, then the soldiers in the Gospel who asked how they were to be saved should have been given the advice to throw down their arms and give up military service entirely. But what was told them was: 'Do violence to no man, neither calumniate any man; and be content with your pay.'²⁵ When he told them they

²⁵ Luke 3.14.

ought to be content with their pay, he obviously did not forbid them to serve in the army. Therefore, let those who say that the teaching of Christ is opposed to the welfare of the state produce such provincial administrators, such husbands, such wives, such parents, such sons, such masters, such slaves, such kings, such judges, and finally such tax-payers and collectors of public revenue as Christian teaching requires them to be, and then let them dare to say that this teaching is opposed to the welfare of the state, or, rather, let them even hesitate to admit that it is the greatest safety of the state, if it is observed.

But what am I to reply to those who say that many evils have befallen the Roman state at the hands of Christian emperors? This is a sweeping complaint and a tricky one. For, if I were to relate frankly certain facts about past emperors, I could detail similar things, or perhaps even worse ones, about the non-Christian emperors, and so they would understand either that the fault was in the men, not in the teaching, or that it was not in the emperors but in those other men without whom emperors cannot get anything done. Their own literature speaks plainly of the time when the Roman state began to decline; long before the name of Christ had shed light upon the earth this was said: 'O mercenary city and ripe for the plucking if it could find a buyer!'²⁶ And in the book on the war with Catiline, which was certainly written before the coming of Christ, this most famous of their historians does not pass over in silence the time when 'first the army of the Roman people began to become adept in making love; in drinking; in admiring statues, pictures, engraved vases; in looting these privately and publicly; in ravaging shrines; in defiling everything both sacred and common.'²⁷ Therefore, when the avarice and greed of corrupt

²⁶ Sallust, *Jug.* 35.10.

²⁷ Sallust, *Cat.* 11.6.

and abandoned morals ceased to spare even those men whom they considered gods, at that moment the much-praised glory and even the survival of the state began to be endangered. It would take too long to tell the outcome of those worst of vices, and of the decline of human fortunes brought on by the increase in wickedness. Let them listen to their own satirist babbling the truth: 'Modest fortune kept the Latin women chaste in the old times, and these things kept their humble homes safe from the touch of vice: toil and brief sleep, and hands hardened and roughened by carding the Tuscan fleece, and Hannibal's approach to the city, and their husbands' having to stand guard on the Colline rampart. But now we suffer the evil effects of long-continued peace; luxury, more cruel than warfare, weighs upon us and takes vengeance of our conquered city. No crime, no deed of lust has been alien to us since Roman poverty perished.'²⁸ How, then, can you expect me to exaggerate the great misfortunes brought on by an immorality carried aloft by its successful onset, when they themselves, though taking a more moderate view, saw that loss of poverty at Rome, rather than of wealth, was a subject of mourning? For, by the former their purity of morals was preserved, but by the latter a dread wickedness, worse than any enemy, invaded, not the walls of the city, but the minds of the citizens.

Thanks to the Lord our God, who has sent us a sovereign help against those evils! Where would that stream of the repulsive malice of the human race not have carried us, who would not have been swept along with it, in what depths would it not have overwhelmed us, if the cross of Christ had not been planted, firm and high, in the great rock of authority, so that we might take hold of its strength and be steadied, and might not be drawn under the vast current of the ruined world by listening to evil advisers, urging us to evil? For, in

²⁸ Juvenal, *Sat.* 6.287-296.

the midst of that filth of depraved morals, and of an ancient decadent learning, it was eminently right for a heavenly authority to come and to bring relief by counseling voluntary poverty, chastity, kindness, justice, concord, true filial love, and those other virtues which are the light and strength of life, not only to make us lead this life with the utmost regard for honor, nor only for the sake of making the society of the earthly city as united as possible, but also that we may attain salvation and reach that heavenly and divine country, whose peoples are immortal. Faith, hope, and charity enroll us as citizens in that country, but, as long as we voyage far from it, we are to bear with those—if we cannot bring about their amendment—who hold that without punishing vice that state can survive, that state which the first Romans founded and increased by their virtues. For, although they did not have true devotion to the true God, which could have led them by a saving religion to the eternal City, they did preserve a certain characteristic uprightness, sufficient to found, increase, and preserve an earthly city. God showed in the rich and far-famed Roman Empire how much can be achieved by natural virtues without true religion, so that we might understand how, with this added, men can become citizens of another state whose king is truth, whose law is love, whose measure is eternity.

Who could think it a fit matter for laughter that men should try to compare or even prefer Apollonius and Apuleius and other adepts of the magic arts to Christ? Yet, it is more readily bearable for them to compare men to Him rather than their gods, for we have to admit that Apuleius was much better than that originator and perpetrator of so many debaucheries whom they call Jupiter. 'Oh, those things,' they say, 'are imaginary tales.' Then let them go on praising the debauched, licentious, and wholly sacrilegious good fortune of the state which imagined such vileness in their gods, and

which not only set them forth in tales to be listened to, but even acted them in the theatre to be looked at, where there would be more criminal acts than divinities and such acts as those gods took pleasure in having displayed in their presence, whereas they ought to have punished their worshipers for even looking on them with patience. 'But,' they say, 'it is not they who are honored by such lying tales.' Who, then, are the beings who are appeased by such vile observances? Because the teaching of Christianity has uncovered the malice and deceit of those demons through whose power magic arts lead human minds astray, because it has revealed this to the whole world, because it has made a distinction between their wickedness and the holy angels, because it has warned us whom to guard against and how to guard against them, it is called hostile to the state. As if we should not rather choose any misfortune if temporal good fortune were to be obtained exclusively through them! But God did not wish us to have any doubt on this point, as long as the Old Testament, which is the veil of the New Testament, remained unknown, and He treated that people who first adored the one true God and despised the utterly false gods by honoring them with such good fortune of earthly goods that anyone might understand that the gift of such fortune was not in the power of demons, but of Him alone whom the angels serve, 'before Whom the devils tremble.'²⁹

But, to speak more especially of Apuleius, who as an African³⁰ is better known to us Africans, he was not able, for all his magic arts, to achieve any judicial power in the state, much less anything like a throne, although he was born to a position respected in his own country, received the education of a gentleman, and was gifted with stirring eloquence. But, perhaps you may say, as a philosopher he voluntarily looked

²⁹ James 2.19.

³⁰ He came from Madaura.

down on such things, since he was a priest of such influence in the province that he provided the public games, clothed the wild-beast fighters, and even undertook a law suit against certain citizens who were opposed to setting up a statue to him at Oea,³¹ the city from which his wife came. And so that posterity would know about it, he handed down in writing a speech which he made in that law suit. So, as far as achieving earthly prosperity was concerned, he was a magician, because that much he could do, but it is clear that he was nothing more, not because he would not, but because he could not be such. Yet, he defended himself with the utmost eloquence against certain persons who accused him of practising magic arts, which makes me marvel at his admirers, who claim that by those arts he performed some miracles or other, trying to set themselves up as witnesses against his own defense. They had better see whether they are offering true evidence or whether he made up a false defense. Those who pry into magic arts either to gain earthly prosperity or out of a culpable curiosity, or those who praise such practices with dangerous admiration, though innocent themselves, should take note, if they are wise, and look at our David, a shepherd who rose to the position of king without any such arts. The Scripture has faithfully recorded both his sins and his good deeds, so that we may know what does not offend God, and what wins His favor when He has been offended.

So, with regard to the miracles which are displayed for the stupefaction of human senses, those persons are very wrong who compare magicians to the holy Prophets, well known for the fame of their great miracles, but how much worse to compare them to Christ, whose coming those Prophets—and no magicians of any sort are to be compared to them—foretold both according to the flesh, which He took

31 A town of Africa, now Tripoli.

from a virgin, and according to the divinity by which He is never separated from the Father!

I see that I have written a very lengthy letter, yet I have not said everything about Christ that could fully satisfy either those³² who cannot fathom divine truths because of a slow mind, or those who are easily impressed, but are held back from understanding either by a stubborn zeal or the prejudice of long-standing error. But, find out what urges them to oppose us, and let me know, and I will try to answer all their objections in letters or treatises, with the help of God. By His grace and mercy, may you be happy in the Lord, excellent and justly distinguished Sir, my most dear and cherished son.

139. *Augustine gives greeting in the Lord to the justly distinguished lord, his most dear and much cherished son, Marcellinus¹ (412)*
(412)

I am eagerly awaiting the records² which your Excellency promised, and I am more and more anxious to have them read in the church at Hippo, and also in all the churches established in the diocese, that men may hear them and fully recognize the confessors of iniquity. It was not the fear of God that drove them to repentance, but the alertness of the court that revealed the hardness of the cruel hearts of those who admitted³ the murder, as well as the blinding and maiming of a priest; and of those who dared not deny

32 A lacuna is noted here in the Vienna text.

1 Cf. Letter 128 n. 3.

2 The minutes of the meeting between Donatists and Catholics over which Marcellinus presided. Cf. Letters 128, 129.

3 This word is missing from the Mss. and is supplied by the editors. The murdered priest was Restitutus; the maimed one, Innocentius. Cf. Letter 133.

that they could have known of those excesses, although they said they were displeased by them, they refused to make peace with the Catholic Church on pretext of not being defiled by others' crimes, and they remained in the sacrilege of schism in the midst of a mob of monstrous criminals. Those also were shown up who said they would not give up the wrongness of the Donatists even after the truth of Catholicism had been proved to them. It is no slight thing that God is doing by your agency; may you hear many such cases about them and their misdeeds, may their senseless obstinacy be as frequently made public, and may these same public records be produced for the information of all. As to what your Excellency wrote about doubting whether you ought to order these same records to be posted in the Theoprepia,⁴ do so, if a large crowd can gather there; otherwise, some more roomy place should be provided, for the matter should under no circumstances be neglected.

But, I ask you that the punishment of the crimes, however great, which they have confessed, may be something short of death, and I ask it for the sake of my own conscience, as well as to give an example of Catholic moderation. For, the very fruit which has accrued to us from their confession is that the Catholic Church has found an opportunity for maintaining and displaying her leniency toward her most savage enemies, since, of a truth, after such cruelty as theirs, any penalty which is inflicted, short of bloodshed, will seem like leniency. Although this seems to some of ours, wrought up by their inhumanity, to be unjust, and a sign of laxity and indifference, still, when their emotions have calmed down—and they were naturally deeply affected by recent happenings—this goodness will shine out as something exceedingly beautiful, and this will be a greater reason for you to take pleasure in reading and displaying these same

4 A church at Carthage belonging to the Donatists.

records, deservedly illustrious Sir, my very dear and cherished son. My holy brother and fellow bishop, Boniface,⁵ is there, and I have sent a letter of instructions through the deacon Peregrinus,⁶ who traveled with him; take this as if I were there in person, and, whatever you decide in common is for the good of the Church, do that with the help of the Lord, who is able to aid you with His mercy in the midst of such evils. Recently, Macrobius,⁷ their bishop, went about here and there, escorted by bands of desperate characters, of both sexes; he opened basilicas⁸ which some modest fear of their owners had closed. But, in the presence of the procurator, Spondeus, son of the noble Celer, whom I have recommended and do earnestly recommend to your Charity, their boldness has somewhat broken down. However, since Macrobius has gone to Carthage, he has now opened basilicas on the very estates of the procurator, and is gathering in the people. With him is that deacon, Donatus, who was rebaptized, although he was a tenant-farmer of the Church; he took an active part in that murder.⁹ What kind of men must have been with him when he was with Macrobius? If the proconsul,¹⁰ or both of you, intend to pass sentence on them, and he persists in wanting to behead them, although he is a Christian, and as far as I can see, not inclined to bloodshed, then, if it should be necessary, order my letters, which I thought wise to write to you individually,¹¹ to be forwarded with the records. I hear that a judge generally has power to lighten a sentence and to inflict a punishment lighter than the law requires. If, how-

5 Bishop of Cataquas, a town near Hippo. Cf. Letters 96,98.

6 Companion to Boniface at the Conference. Two years later he was made bishop, but it is not known of what locality. Letter 149 is addressed to him.

7 Donatist bishop at Hippo. Letters 106 and 108 are addressed to him.

8 Probably basilicas which the Donatists had been ordered to return to the Catholics.

9 Of the priest, Restitutus.

10 Cf. Letter 134.

11 Letters 133,134.

ever, he will not yield to this request in my letter, let him at least grant that they be kept under guard. We have arranged to refer this matter to the clemency of the emperors, so that the sufferings of the servants of God, which ought to be the glory of the Church, may not be dishonored by the blood of their enemies. I know that in the case of the clerics of Anaunia,¹² who were killed by pagans and are now honored as martyrs, the emperor was petitioned, and readily granted that the murderers, who had been captured and imprisoned, should not suffer the death penalty.

I have forgotten why I received back the copy of the book on the baptism of children which I had sent to your Excellency, unless, perhaps, it was because I found it faulty when I had looked it over, and I wanted to correct it, but I have been so unbelievably busy that I have not done so. There was also a letter to be written and added to the manuscript, and I began to dictate it while I was there, but you must know that I have added a little to it and it is still unfinished. If I could give you an account of my days and of the labor I expend at night on other pressing duties, you would be surprised and very sorry at the great burdens which weigh me down, which cannot be put off, and which prevent me from doing those things which you ask and urge me to do, willing though I am and more grieved than I can say at not being able to do them. When I get a little time, free from my obligations to those men who put such pressure upon me that I cannot in any way avoid them, and I ought not to show them contempt, there are plenty of details having a priority on the scraps of time devoted to dictation, and they are such as will not bear delay. There was, for instance, that summary of our conference, a laborious task which fell to me when I saw that no one was willing to lend himself to the reading of such a pile of documents; there was also the

12 A valley near the city of Trent, where Sisinnius, Martyrius, and Alexander were killed by pagan rustics in 397

letter to the Donatist laity regarding this same conference of ours, which I finished only after several nights of work; there were the two long letters, one to your Charity, the other to the worthy Volusian, which I believe you have now received. At present, I have in hand a book¹³ for our friend, Honoratus, in answer to some five questions which he proposed to me, and insisted upon in a letter, and you can see how unsuitable it would be for me not to answer him as soon as possible. Charity, like a nurse caring for her children, gives the weak preference over the strong, not that they are more worthy of love, but more needy of help, and she wishes them to be like the others whom she passes over for a time as a mark of trust, not of contempt. Such necessities cannot be lacking for dictating something, and they prevent me from dictating what I ardently long to do, when a small bit of time is left me between my piled-up duties, which keep me weighed down with other people's ambitions and necessities, and I do not know what else I can do.

You have heard enough to make you pray to the Lord with me, but in the matter of your urging me so earnestly and so often I do not want you to stop, seeing that you do accomplish something. I also recommend to your Excellency the church established in Numidia. It is to represent the interests of that church that my holy brother and fellow bishop Delphinus¹⁴ has been sent by my brothers and fellow bishops, who labor and face danger there together. I shall not write more on this matter, because you will see him in person. You will find the other points in the instructions which I sent to the priest recently, or through the deacon Peregrinus, and so I shall not have to repeat them so many times. May your heart always be strong and rejoice in Christ, deservedly distinguished lord, my very dear and much cherished son. I recommend to your Excellency my son Rufinus, the chief official of Cirta.

¹³ Letter 140.

¹⁴ Coadjutor bishop to Fortunatus, Bishop of Cirta.

140. Addressed to Honoratus¹ (412)

THE BOOK ON GRACE, AS SET FORTH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

You proposed to me, dear brother Honoratus, five questions² to discuss and to solve, picked out at random, as they either impressed you in your reading or came to your mind in thought, and you presented them to me in a certain order. It seems to me it would be a hard task to weave them and join them together into a single coherent whole, if I tried to arrange the solution by discussing them singly and piecemeal as they are proposed. Yet, I think they will be more easily answered if I do join them, because they will help each other if one is linked to the other, until all come into the sequence of the discussion, not one by one in separate places, as if each one dwelt in its own private meaning, but directed to one end and working together at one thing with a share for each in the reasoning and a single truth for each.

Chapter 1

You wanted, then, and in your letter you urged me to explain and make clear for you the meaning of those words of the Lord: 'My God, why hast thou forsaken me?'¹ and what the Apostle meant when he said 'that being rooted

1 A catechumen, not yet baptized, who later was ordained a priest.

2 His five questions gave Augustine the opportunity to marshal arguments against the rising power of the Pelagians. Pelagius, a monk who fled from Rome to Africa to escape the barbarians, denied the necessity of grace for good works, its purely gratuitous character, and the moral weakness of man wounded by original sin. He gave the chief part in Christian perfection to the action of the human will. Augustine speaks of the origin of this letter-tract in *Retractations* 2.36.

1 Ps. 22.1; Matt. 27.46; Mark 15.34.

and founded in charity you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth;² and who the foolish virgins were and who the wise;³ and what the exterior darkness is;⁴ and how we are to understand "The word of God was made flesh."⁵ These five questions have been as briefly reviewed by me as they were proposed by you. Therefore, if you agree, let us add a sixth, and let us, before all, seek out the meaning of grace in the New Testament. Let all of yours be referred to that, and let each one, as it conveniently can, do its part for us, not, evidently, in the order in which you proposed and I recalled them, but let each one, when needed, answer the call, so to speak, and fulfill its duty. Let this do for an introduction.

Chapter 2

There is a certain life of man involved in the carnal senses, given up to carnal joys, avoiding carnal hurt, seeking carnal pleasure. The happiness of this life is temporal: to begin with this life is a matter of necessity; to continue in it a matter of choice. Doubtless, the infant issues forth into this life from the womb of its mother; as far as it can, it avoids the hurts, seeks the pleasures of this life; nothing else counts. But, after it reaches the age at which the use of reason awakens, and its will is divinely aided, it can choose another life whose joy is in the mind, whose happiness is interior and eternal. Truly there is in man a rational soul, but it makes a difference which way he turns the use of the reason by his will: whether to the goods of his external and lower nature or to the goods of

2 Eph. 3.18.

3 Matt. 25.2.

4 Matt. 8.12; 22.13.

5 John 1.14.

his interior and higher nature, that is, whether his enjoyment is corporeal and temporal, or divine and eternal. This soul is placed in a middle state, having below it the physical creation and above it the Creator of itself and its body.

The rational soul can, then, make good use of temporal and corporeal pleasure, provided it does not give itself up entirely to created things, and thereby abandon the Creator, but, rather, finds its happiness in serving the Creator, who has enriched it with the overflowing abundance of His own goodness. For, just as all the things which God has created are good, from the rational being itself to the lowest form of physical life, so the rational soul acts rightly toward these things if it preserves due order among them, and by distinguishing, choosing, weighing them, subordinates the lesser to the greater, the corporeal to the spiritual, the lower to the higher, the temporal to the eternal, lest by a neglect of the higher things and a craving for the lower it bring itself and its body into a worse state, whereas it should rather bring itself and its body to a better state by putting charity in its due place. And, since all substances are naturally good, a praiseworthy rank among them is honored, but a culpable disorder is condemned. The soul which makes a bad use of created things does succeed in escaping the rule of the Creator, since, if it makes a bad use of good, He likewise makes a good use of evil; then the soul, by using good things badly, becomes evil, but He, by making an orderly use of evil, remains good. Whoever unjustly gives himself over to sin is justly given over to punishment.

Therefore, when God wished to show that even earthly and temporal happiness is His gift and is not to be hoped for from any other than Him, He decreed that the Old Testament should be imparted to those early ages of the world which belonged to primitive man, from whom that life necessarily took its rise. But, those joys of the patriarchs, although

belonging to this transitory life, are spoken of as granted by the bounty of God. Doubtless, those earthly gifts were promised and granted openly, but the New Testament was secretly foreshadowed in figure by all those things, and was so accepted by the understanding of a few, whom that same grace had made worthy of the gift of prophecy. Those saints therefore made known the Old Testament in accord with the time, but they belonged to the New Testament. For, when they lived in temporal happiness, they understood that the true eternal happiness is to be preferred, and they made use of the former as a mystery in order to attain the latter as a reward. And, if ever they suffered adversity, they bore it with this intention, that when they were delivered by the very evident divine help, they might glorify God, the Giver of all good things, not only the eternal which they devoutly hoped for, but even the temporal over which they prophetically exercised dominion.

Chapter 3

‘But when the fulness of the time was come,’ that the grace which was concealed in the Old Testament should now be revealed, ‘God sent his Son, made of a woman,’¹—the peculiarity of the Hebrew tongue uses this word² to apply to every member of the female sex,³ whether married or unmarried. That you may know what Son He sent, whom He willed to be made of a woman, and how great a God He is, give attention now to the Gospel: ‘In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; the same was in the beginning with God. All things

1 Gal. 4.4.

2 In Latin, *mulier* was used of a married woman; *virgo*, of an unmarried one.

3 There is no way in English of distinguishing the more general word *femina* from *mulier*.

were made by him and without him was made nothing that was made. In him was life and the life was the light of men, and the light shineth in darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it.⁴ This God, then, the Word of God by whom all things were made, is the Son of God, remaining unchangeable, everywhere present, neither enclosed in any space, nor distributed in parts through all space, as if He should have a smaller part of Himself in a smaller space, and a larger part in a larger space, but wholly present everywhere, and thus not absent even from the minds of the wicked, although they do not see Him; just as this light is not seen by the blind, though present to their eyes. Therefore, it shines in the darkness, such as the Apostle indicates when he says: 'For you were heretofore darkness, but now light in the Lord,'⁵ but such darkness did not comprehend it.

Thus, He became a man whom men could see, so that, healed by faith, they might afterwards see what then they could not see. But, lest the man, Christ, by the very fact of appearing visibly, should not be believed to be God, and only that much high grace and wisdom should be attributed to Him as is fitting for a man, 'There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness to give testimony of the light, that all men might believe through Him. He was not the light, but was to give testimony of the light.'⁶ It was fitting, then, for a man to give testimony of Him who was not only man, but God, who should be so great that 'there hath not risen among them that are born of women a greater than John the Baptist,'⁷ for so it would be understood that the one to whom the greater John gave testimony was greater than he, inasmuch as He was not only man but even God. Therefore, John was a light, and

4 John 1.1-5.

5 Eph 5.8.

6 John 1.6-8.

7 Matt. 11.11.

such a light that the Lord Himself gives testimony to him, saying: 'He was a burning and a shining light,'⁸ as He also said to His disciples: 'You are the light of the world;' and to show them what kind of light, He went on and added: 'No one lights a candle and puts it under a bushel, but upon a candlestick that it may shine to all that are in the house. So let your light shine before men.'⁹ These comparisons are given so that, as far as possible, we may understand, or, if this is not yet possible, that we may believe without any doubt, that the rational soul is not the nature of God—for that, indeed, is unchangeable—but still the soul can share in it by being illumined, since candles need to be lighted and can be extinguished. Therefore, the words He said of John: 'He was not the light,' are to be referred to that light which is not enkindled by sharing in another light, whereas other lights which are enkindled by Him share in His light.

Finally, there follows: 'He was the true light,' and as if we might enquire how the true light is distinguished from the enkindled light, that is, Christ from John, he says: 'That was the true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world.'¹⁰ If every man, then John also. And to show His divinity by a much more striking difference, he says: 'He was in this world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.' It was not the world made by Him which did not know Him, for only the rational being has the power of knowing Him—although it is true that the visible world, that is, heaven and earth, was made by Him—but he indicated by His reproach the world that did not know Him, namely, the unbelievers who are established in the world.

Then he adds: 'He came into his own and his own received him not,' either because those very unbelievers, inasmuch as

⁸ John 5.35.

⁹ Cf. Matt.5.14-16.

¹⁰ John 1.9.

they are men, are His, having been created by Him, or He wished it understood that the Jews were peculiarly His own, since He took His fleshly nature from them. However, all did not refuse to receive Him, for he goes on as follows and says: 'But as many as received him, he gave them power to be made the sons of God, to them that believe in his name, who are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.'¹¹ This is the grace of the New Testament, which lay hid in the Old, yet was constantly prophesied and foretold by veiled figures, so that the soul might recognize its God and be reborn to Him, by His grace. This is truly a spiritual birth, therefore not of blood, nor of the will of man, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God.

Chapter 4

This is called adoption. For we were something before we were the sons of God, and we received the benefit of becoming what we were not, just as the one who is adopted, before adoption, was not yet the son of the one who adopts him; still, he was one who could be adopted. From this begetting by grace we distinguish that son who, although He was the Son of God, came that He might become the son of man, and might give us, who were sons of man, the power to become the sons of God. He, indeed, became what He was not; nevertheless, He was something else, and this something was the Word of God, by whom all things were made, and the true light which enlightens every man, and God with God. Still, we were something, and this same something was much lower, that is, sons of men. He therefore descended that we might ascend, and, while remaining in His own nature, became a sharer in our nature, so that we, while

¹¹ John 1.10.

remaining in our own nature, might become sharers in His nature; but not in the same way, for He did not become worse by sharing in our nature, but we become better by sharing in His.

Therefore, 'God sent his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.'¹ For, He undertook the obligations of the Law 'that He might redeem them that were under the law,' that is, those whom the Law held as guilty by the letter which kills,² by reason of their not fulfilling the commandment, in the time before the spirit quickened them, because 'the charity of God,' which fulfills the commandment, 'is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us.'³ Therefore, when he had said: 'that he might redeem them who were under the law,' he straightway added: 'that we might receive the adoption of sons,'⁴ in order, no doubt, to distinguish the grace of this benefit from the nature of His son, who was sent as a son eternally begotten, not made so by adoption, intending by sharing the nature of the sons of men to adopt the sons of men into a share in His own nature. Therefore, also, when he had said: 'He gave them power to be made the sons of God,' and had immediately added: 'them that believe in his name,' lest they should think a carnal birth was being offered them, whereas they are reborn through spiritual grace, 'not of blood, nor of the will of man, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God,' he then praised the mystery of this change, and as if, in our wonder at so great a good, we might not dare to ask for it, he at once added: 'And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.'⁵ And that is one of those five passages which you wished to have explained, as if He should say: 'O men, do not despair of being able to

1 Gal. 4.4.5.

2 2 Cor. 3.6.

3 Rom. 5.5.

4 Gal. 4.5.

5 John 1.12-14.

become the sons of God, because He Himself, the Son of God, that is, the Word of God, was made flesh and dwelt among us. Make Him a return, become spirit and dwell in Him who was made flesh and dwelt among us.' Since the Son of God by sharing in our flesh became the son of man, men need not despair of being able to become the sons of God by sharing in the Word.

We changeable creatures, then, become sharers in the Word, to be changed for the better, but the unchangeable Word, in no wise changed for the worse, has become a sharer in our flesh by the medium of a rational soul. For, it was not true, as the Apollinarist heretics⁶ thought, that the man Christ either did not have a soul or did not have a rational soul, but the Scripture, in its own way, so as not to appear to avoid the word 'flesh' as something unfitting, has put 'flesh' for 'man.' Because it is written: 'All flesh shall see the salvation of God,'⁷ we are not to understand that souls are thereby excluded. Therefore, when the Scripture says: 'The Word was made flesh,' it is the same as if it said: 'The Son of God became a son of man.' 'Who being in the form of God,' as the Apostle says, 'thought it not robbery to be equal with God,'⁸ for it was not a question of usurpation, of the sort that could be called robbery, but it was inherent in His nature to be equal. Nevertheless, 'he emptied himself,' not losing the form of God, but 'taking the form of a servant. He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross.'⁹ See, then how the same man, whom he commends as God, is one Person, lest we should think that the Trinity is a quaternity. For, just as the number of persons is not increased when flesh is joined to soul to form

6 These held that in Christ there was no human soul. Alypius, Augustine's close friend, held this view before this conversion.

7 Isa. 40.5 (Septuagint), as quoted by Luke 3.6.

8 Phil. 2.6.

9 Phil. 2.7,8.

one man, so the number of Persons is not increased when man is added to the Word, to form one Christ. We read, therefore: 'the Word was made flesh,' so as to understand the oneness of this Person, yet not to imagine that the divinity has been changed into flesh.

Chapter 5

Thus, the man Christ was not to be recommended to us by reason of earthly happiness, because by Him the grace of the New Testament was to be revealed, which belongs to eternal not to temporal life. Hence, subjection, suffering, scourging, being spat upon, contempt, the cross, wounds, and death itself were to be His, as if He had been overcome and made prisoner by them, so that His faithful might learn what reward for their devotion they should ask and hope for from Him whose sons they had become, and might not serve God for the purpose of seeking to gain temporal happiness as a great boon, and by so serving Him should cast away and trample on their faith, rating it as a cheap reward. Hence, almighty God, by a most bountiful providence, granted earthly happiness to the wicked so that the good might not seek it as a great boon. For this reason, Psalm 72 shows us man repenting because at one time he had served God for this reward, with a heart that was not upright. Then, when he saw the wicked prosper and abound, he was disturbed and began to think that God had no care of human happenings. When the authority of the saints who belong to God had recalled him from that thought, he strove and studied to know this great secret, which was not revealed to him in his toiling until he entered into the sanctuary of God, and understood their last ends,¹ that is, until, having received the Holy Spirit, he learned to desire better things, and to look

1 Ps. 71.

forward to the future punishment awaiting sinners, even those who had flourished with a temporal prosperity as fleeting as the grass of the field.² Note this Psalm 72 carefully and read it attentively, as it has been interpreted by my effort on the night which was the eve of the feast of the most blessed Cyprian.³

Therefore the man, Christ, who is likewise the God, Christ, by whose most compassionate humanity and in whose form of servant we ought to learn what is to be despised in this life and what is to be hoped for in the other, in that very Passion in which His victorious enemies seemed great, took on the speech of our infirmity, in which 'our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed,'⁴ and said: 'My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?'⁵ And this is one of your five propositions. Thus Psalm 21 begins, which was sung so long a time ago, in prophecy of His Passion and the revelation of the grace which He brought to raise up His faithful and set them free.

Chapter 6

Therefore, I shall go through that same psalm, whose prophecy the Lord pointed out as applying to Himself, when He cried out its first verse, as He hung on the cross, and I shall review and comment upon it, so that you may understand how the grace of the New Testament was not

² Matt. 6.30.

³ His feast is celebrated on September 16. 'Night' undoubtedly refers to the Office of Matins. It was customary to have a homily delivered by the officiating priest or prelate. At present, such homilies are read in the form of Lessons in each Nocturn. Augustine probably delivered his exposition of Psalm 72 on such an occasion.

⁴ Rom. 6.6.

⁵ Ps. 21.2; Matt. 27.46; Mark 15.34.

unmentioned in that time when it was veiled in the Old Testament. For, it is spoken of the Person of Christ in so far as it refers to the form of the servant, in which He bore our infirmity. Isaias also said of Him: 'He bears our infirmity, and is in sorrow for us.'¹ Out of the voice of this infirmity Paul prayed and was not heard, being, in a sense, abandoned; nevertheless, he heard these words from the Lord: 'My grace is sufficient for thee, for power is made perfect in infirmity.'² Out of the voice, then, of this infirmity of ours, which our Head transferred to Himself, the psalm utters these words: 'My God, my God, look upon me, why hast thou forsaken me?'³ Doubtless, He is forsaken, inasmuch as His prayer was not heard; Jesus transferred this voice to Himself, the voice, no doubt of human weakness, to which the goods of the Old Testament had to be refused, that it might learn to pray and hope for the goods of the New Testament.

But, among those goods of the Old Testament, which belonged to the old man, there is a special desire for the prolonging of this temporal life, so that it may be held somewhat longer, which is not always possible. Thus, all indeed know that the day of death will come, yet all, or nearly all, strive to postpone it, even those who believe that their life after death will be a happier one—so much force has the sweet partnership of flesh and soul! 'For no man ever hated his own flesh,'⁴ and therefore the soul does not wish to be parted, even for a time, from its own infirmity, although it hopes to receive it back again without infirmity. Therefore, the godly man, serving the law of God in his mind, but dragging about in his flesh the desires of sin,⁵ which the Apostle bids him not obey, by his reason and mind 'desires

1 Cf. Isa. 53.4.

2 2 Cor. 12.9.

3 Ps. 21.2.

4 Eph. 5.29.

5 Rom. 7.25.

to be dissolved and to be with Christ,⁶ but with the instinct of the flesh revolts against this and runs from it, and, if it were possible, he does not wish to be 'unclothed but to be clothed upon that the mortal may be swallowed up in life,'⁷ that is, that the body itself may be transferred from infirmity to immortality without the intervention of death.

But these words in which the human day and length of this life are desired are the words of sins, and are far from that salvation⁸ which we now possess in hope, if not yet in fact, as it is written: 'for we are saved by hope, but the hope that is seen is not hope.'⁹ Therefore, when, in that psalm, he had said: 'O God, my God, look upon me, why hast thou forsaken me?' he immediately goes on: 'Far from my salvation are the words of my sins,' that is, these are the words of my sins, and they are far from that salvation of mine, which the grace of the New, not of the Old, Testament promises me. But, it can also be explained thus: 'O God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me far from my salvation?' as if he said: 'By forsaking me, that is, by not hearing my prayer, thou art far from my present salvation,' namely, the salvation of this life, so that another meaning may be given to 'words of my sins,' that is, those words which I spoke are words of sins because they are words of carnal desire.

These words Christ speaks in the person of His Body, which is the Church; these words He speaks in the person of the infirmity of sinful flesh, which He transformed into that flesh taken from the Virgin, 'the likeness of sinful flesh';¹⁰ these words the bridegroom speaks in the person of the bride, because, in a sense, He joined her to Himself. And in Isaias, where it says: 'As a bridegroom he hath decked me with a

6 Phil. 1.23.

7 2 Cor. 5.4.

8 Ps. 21.2.

9 Rom. 8.24.

10 Rom. 8.3.

crown; and as a bride he hath adorned me with jewels,'¹¹ the words, 'he decked me' and 'he hath adorned me,' are spoken of one person, but we understand the bridegroom and the bride to be Christ and the Church. But 'they shall be two in one flesh, a great sacrament,' the Apostle says, 'in Christ and in the Church';¹² 'therefore now they are not two but one flesh.'¹³ If one flesh, then they are properly one voice. What do you here ask, human infirmity, of the voice of the Word by whom all things were made? Hear, rather, the voice of the flesh, which was made in the midst of all things, since 'the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us';¹⁴ here, rather, the voice of the cure, by which you are made whole, that you may see God, whom He postponed as an object of sight, but He brought you a man to be seen, He offered him to be killed, He lent him to be imitated, He gave him over to be believed, so that by that faith the eye of the mind might be healed, so as to see God. Why, then, do we disdain to hear the voice of the body from the mouth of our Head? The Church suffered in Him when He suffered for the Church, just as He suffered in the Church when he suffered for the Church. For, just as we have heard the voice of the Church suffering in Christ: 'O God, my God, look upon me, why hast thou forsaken me?'¹⁵ so we have also heard the voice of Christ suffering in the Church: 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?'¹⁶

Chapter 7

When, then, our prayers are not heard in regard to keeping

11 Isa. 61.10. (Septuagint).

12 Eph. 5.31,32.

13 Matt. 19.6.

14 John 1.3.

15 Ps. 21.2.

16 Acts 9.4.

or gaining temporal goods, when we ask God for these, inasmuch as He does not hear us, He forsakes us, but, in regard to the better gifts which He wishes us to understand and prefer and desire, He does not forsake us. Hence the psalm goes on and says: 'I have cried to thee by day, and thou shalt not hear, and by night'—here we understand 'thou wilt not hear,'—but see what it adds: 'it shall not be reputed as folly in me.'¹ This, then, is what the Psalmist says: 'Thou shalt not hear me crying by day, that is, in prosperity, that I may not lose it; nor by night, that is, in adversity, that what I have lost may return, but thou wilt not impute this to me as folly, rather thou wilt make me know what I ought now to expect, desire and ask of thee, through the grace of the New Testament. Doubtless I cry that temporal goods may not be taken away from me, but 'thou dwellest in the holy place, the praise of Israel.'² I do not wish that thou shouldst forsake my covetousness, by which I seek carnal happiness, but this is the soiled garment of the old, while thou seekest the clean garment of the new; by not hearing me, thou forsakest that covetousness because thou seekest to dwell in charity, but 'the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given to us.'³ Therefore, thou dwellest in the holy place, the praise of Israel; the praise of those who see thee, because they are not praised in themselves but in thee; for what have they that they have not received,⁴ that 'he that glorieth, may glory in the Lord'?⁵

This is the grace of the New Testament. For, in the Old Testament, when Thou didst make clear that earthly and temporal happiness was to be sought and hoped for from Thee alone: 'In thee have our fathers hoped, they have hoped and

1 Cf. Ps. 21.3.

2 Ps. 21.4.

3 Rom. 5.5.

4 1 Cor. 4.7.

5 1 Cor. 1.31.

thou hast delivered them. They cried to thee and they were saved; they hoped in thee and were not confounded.⁶ Those fathers who lived among enemies Thou didst both fill with riches and deliver from their enemies, and make them gain glorious victories, and deliver from various kinds of death. For one Thou didst furnish a ram that he might not be struck;⁷ another Thou didst cleanse of a foul sickness, and didst restore to him twice as much as he had lost;⁸ another Thou didst preserve unhurt and untouched among hungry lions;⁹ and Thou wert praised by the grateful voice of others, walking up and down in the midst of flames.¹⁰ The Jews expected some such wonders to be done in the case of Christ, that they might prove whether He was truly the Son of God. In their person the Book of Wisdom speaks: 'Let us condemn him to a most shameful death, for there shall be no respect had unto him by his words. For if he be the true son of God, he will defend him, and will deliver him from the hands of his enemies. These things,' it says, 'they thought and were deceived, for their own malice blinded them.'¹¹ Taking note, then, of the time of the Old Testament and of that temporal happiness of their fathers, in furnishing which God had proved that even such gifts were from Him, they did not see that the time was at hand when it would be revealed in Christ that God gives eternal goods exclusively to the good, but He bestows temporal goods even on the wicked.

6 Ps. 21.5,6.

7 Isaac. Gen. 22.13.

8 Job 42.10.

9 Dan. 14.30-40.

10 Dan. 3.23.

11 Wisd. 1.1-5.

Chapter 8

Finally, when he said: 'In thee have our fathers hoped; they have hoped and thou hast delivered them. They cried to thee, and they were saved; they hoped in thee and were not confounded,' see what he added: 'But I am a worm and no no man.'¹ This seems to have been said simply to commend his humility, that he might appear in the eyes of his persecutors as something extremely abject and contemptible, but the loftiness of the secret and the depth of the mystery are not to be despised, especially in those words which are adapted, in the teaching of prophecy, to the greatness of our Saviour. A very subtle meaning was inferred from this by earlier writers: that this passage foretold Christ by name because the worm is produced without sexual mating, just as He was born of a virgin.² But, when Job speaks in his book of the heavenly bodies and says that they are scarcely pure in the sight of God: 'How much more,' he says, 'is man rottenness and the son of man a worm.'³ He used the word 'rottenness' for mortality, which even at its conception is stamped with its destiny of death, into which man was thrust by sin; he speaks of the son of man as a worm, born of rottenness, using 'rotten,' instead of 'mortal,' born of mortality. Thus he urges us to seek another meaning for these words of the psalm, without either accepting or rejecting the other, so that we are to look into what he said; not only: 'But I am a worm' but also what he added: 'and no man,' according to the quotation I have given from the Book of Job. It is as if he said: 'But I am a son of man and not a man; not because Christ is not a man, of whom the Apostle said:

¹ Ps. 21.5,7.

² Origen, *Homily on Luke 14*; Jerome, *On Ps. 21*.

³ Cf. Job 25.5,6.

'There is one mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus,'⁴—for every son of man is a man—but this interpretation applies to one who was a man without being a son of man, namely, Adam. Perhaps, then, it says this: 'But I am a worm and no man,' that is, I am a son of man and no man, as if he said: 'But I am Christ, in whom all are made alive, not Adam, in whom all die.'⁵

And learn from this, men, to desire eternal life now, through the grace of the New Testament. Why do you wish, as a great boon, to be delivered by the Lord from death, as your fathers were delivered, when God made manifest that He Himself and no other was the giver of earthly happiness? That happiness belongs to the old man, the oldness which Adam began; 'but I am a worm, and no man,' Christ, not Adam. You were old, of an old stock; be now new, of a new stock, men sprung from Adam, sons of men from Christ. Not without reason does the Lord refer to Himself familiarly in the Gospel as the son of man,⁶ rather than as man; not without reason does he say in another psalm: 'Men and beasts thou wilt preserve, O Lord; how hast thou multiplied thy mercy, O God!'⁷ It is true this preservation is extended by Thee to men and beasts alike. But the new men have an entirely new preservation, peculiar to themselves, separate from their common lot with beasts, which belongs to the New Testament. Of that he goes on in the same verse and says: 'But the children of men shall put their trust under the covert of thy wings. They shall be inebriated with the plenty of thy house, and thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of thy pleasure, for with thee is the fountain of life, and in thy light we shall see light.' Certainly, here, although above he had said 'men,' he said afterward 'sons of

4 1 Tim. 2.5.

5 1 Cor. 15.22.

6 Matt. 17.9,12,21.

7 Ps. 35.8-10.

men,' as if making a distinction between 'men' and 'sons of men.' Doubtless, in that happiness of deliverance which is common to men and beasts, He willed to call them by the name which proves that they are derived from the first man, in whom oldness began and death, and who was a man without being a son of man; but to those later men who hope for another happiness, the indescribable joy of the fountain of life, and the light of eternal light, He gives this name by which He, their Lord, willed to be called familiarly, in which such a grace is revealed, and He called them sons of men, rather than men.

However, you are not to think that this type of expression is to be used by any hard and fast rule, so that, whenever you read 'men' or 'sons of men,' you are always to understand them according to this distinction, but use them according to the context of your reading; if the meaning is clear, savor it, if it is obscure, dig it out. So, in this passage of the psalm, who does not feel the meaning of this distinction, when, after saying: 'In thee have our fathers hoped and thou hast delivered them; they cried to thee and they were saved; they hoped in thee and were not confounded,' he adds: 'But I'?⁸ He does not say 'and I'; he says 'but I.' What distinction does he then make concerning himself? 'But I,' he says, 'am a worm and no man.' As if Thou didst entrust to them whom Thou didst hear and deliver that earthly happiness which belongs to the Old Testament, and was to be granted to the old man who had his origin in Adam: 'but I am a worm,' that is, a son of man, not a man like that man who was not a son of man.

⁸ Ps. 21.5-7.

Chapter 9

And to this 'I' belongs what follows: 'The reproach of men and the outcast of the people. All they that saw me have laughed me to scorn; they have spoken with the lips and wagged the head: He hoped in God, let him deliver him; let him save him, seeing he delighteth in him.'¹ They said this insultingly with the lips, not the heart, which would not have been the case if they did not believe what was going to happen. But this happened, as it was fitting that it should happen to the Son of man, in whom the hope of eternal life was to be revealed, not as they expected it, but as befits the New Testament. Because they did not see it happening, they gloated over Him as if they had triumphed over Him, belonging as they did to the Old Testament and to the man in whom all die, not to the Son of man in whom all are made alive.² Man indeed brought death to himself and to the Son of man, but the Son of man, by dying and rising again, brought life to man, 'the reproach of men and the outcast of the people,' even to death. He wished to suffer this in the sight of His enemies, that they might think Him, as it were, forsaken, and that the grace of the New Testament might be entrusted to us, to make us learn to seek another happiness, which we now possess by faith, but then we shall behold it. 'For while we are in the body,' says the Apostle, 'we are absent from the Lord, for we walk by faith and not by sight.'³ Therefore, we now live in hope, but then we shall enjoy reality.

Finally, He willed to manifest His Resurrection, not to strangers, but to His own, since it was not fitting that His, like ours, should be long deferred, that we might learn from

1 Ps. 21.7-9.

2 1 Cor. 15.22.

3 2 Cor. 5.6,7.

the example of His flesh, what we should hope for in our own. (I call them strangers not by nature but by sin, which is always contrary to nature.) Therefore, He died in the sight of men, but He rose again in the sight of the sons of men, because death belongs to man, but resurrection to the Son of man, 'for just as in Adam all die, so in Christ all shall be made alive.'⁴ So, then, that He might, by the example of His flesh, encourage His faithful to despise temporal in favor of eternal happiness, He submitted unto death to those who persecuted Him, and raged against Him, and scornfully mocked at Him, as at a beaten and prostrate man. When He raised up His flesh, however, and presented it to be seen and touched by His disciples, and in their sight ascended into heaven, He strengthened them, and showed them by the clearest evidence of truth what they were to expect and what they were to preach. But, as for those at whose hands He suffered such outrages even into death, He left them in their belief, still boasting as if they had overthrown and destroyed Him. But, if any of them wished to be saved by an eternal salvation, he would have to believe in the fact of His resurrection from the dead, according to the preaching, by incontestable proof, of those who had seen it, and who did not shrink from suffering similar trials, as a consequence of that preaching.

Chapter 10

Therefore, even James, one of the Apostles, when he was exhorting the faithful, who still lingered in this life after the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, distinguishing the Old Testament from the New, said in his Epistle: 'You have heard of the patience of Job, and you have seen the end of the

⁴ 1 Cor. 15.22.

Lord.’¹ And he advised them not to endure temporal misfortunes merely in order to recover their loss, as we read that Job did. For, he was cured of that ulcer and corruption, and all that he had lost was restored to him twofold,² whereby his faith in the resurrection was commended. His sons were not returned to him in double number, but he received as many as he had lost, which pointed to the fact of their rising again. Thus they, also, when joined to the former ones, would form a twofold restoration, but would not seem to be different ones. Therefore, to prevent us from hoping for such a reward when we endure temporal misfortunes, he does not say: ‘You have heard of the patience of Job and his end,’ but he says: ‘You have heard of the patience of Job and you have seen the end of the Lord,’ as if he had said: ‘Bear your temporal misfortunes as Job did, but do not hope for temporal goods as a reward for your patience, such as were returned to him double; rather, hope for the eternal goods which the Lord went before us to secure.’ Job was one of those fathers who ‘cried to him and were saved.’³ For, when he says ‘But I,’ he points out adequately the kind of deliverance by which he wishes us to understand they were saved, namely, that in which He was forsaken; not that they were strangers to eternal salvation, but that the secret to be revealed in Christ was still hidden. Doubtless, there is a veil in the Old Testament, which will be removed as soon as one comes to Christ. At His Crucifixion, ‘the veil of the temple was rent,’⁴ to signify what the Apostle said about the veil of the Old Testament, ‘Because in Christ it is made void.’⁵

Among those fathers there were some examples of patience unto death, although they were very few, ‘from the blood of

1 James 5.11.

2 Job 42.10.

3 Ps. 21.6,7.

4 Matt. 27.51.

5 2 Cor. 3.14.

Abel to the blood of Zacharias' whose blood the Lord Jesus said would be required of those who persisted in the wickedness of their fathers, by whom they had been killed.⁶ In the New Testament, also, there was not and is not lacking a large number of good and faithful ones who excelled even in the same temporal happiness, and who recognized in it the goodness and mercy of God, the Giver, holding, nevertheless, what the Apostle, as dispenser of the New Testament, charges to the rich of this world: 'Not to be high-minded, nor to trust in the uncertainty of riches, but in the living God who giveth us abundantly all things to enjoy; to do good, to be rich in good works, to give easily, to communicate to others, to lay up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on the true life.'⁷ Such a life was manifest not only in the spirit but even in the flesh of Christ, when He rose from the dead, but such was not the life which the Jews took away from Him, when God did not deliver Him from their hands, and seemed to forsake Him in spite of His cry: 'O God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'⁸ In this manner He was to transform His martyrs into Himself even though they did not wish to die, just as He said to Peter: 'Another shall gird thee, and lead thee whither thou wouldst not; signifying by what death he should glorify God,'⁹ and for this reason they were to seem to be forsaken by their God for a time, when He refused to grant them what they wished, when they uttered that cry of the heart, and offered Him that tribute of filial love, which the Lord, thus transforming them into Himself, repeatedly uttered with His own lips on the eve of His Passion: 'Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.'¹⁰

6 Cf. Matt. 23.35; Luke 11.51.

7 1 Tim. 6.17-19.

8 Ps. 21.2.

9 John 21.18,19.

10 Matt. 26.39; Mark 14.36.

Chapter 11

And where, except in our Head, should this first appear, since we are Christians because of His life? Therefore, He did not say: 'My God, thou hast forsaken me,' but He showed that the cause should be looked for, when He added: 'Why hast thou forsaken me?' that is, for what reason, on what account, for what cause? Certainly, there was a reason and no slight one why He delivered Noe from the flood,¹ Lot from the fire from heaven,² Isaac from the uplifted sword,³ Joseph from the calumny of a woman and from imprisonment,⁴ Moses from the Egyptians,⁵ Rahab from the destruction of the city,⁶ Susanna from the false witnesses,⁷ Daniel from the lions,⁸ the three men from the flames,⁹ and the other 'fathers who cried to Him and were saved'¹⁰ yet did not deliver Christ from the hands of the Jews, but left Him in the power of those who raged against Him, even to the destruction of death. Why is this? What other reason is there for this than that which He expressed a little later in the same psalm: 'It shall not be reputed as folly in me,'¹¹ that is, in my Body, my Church, my least ones? For, He said in the Gospel: 'As long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me.'¹² Thus, also, He said: 'It shall not be reputed as folly in me,' in the same way in which He said: 'You did it to me';

1 Gen. 6-9.

2 Gen. 19.29.

3 Gen. 22.1-13.

4 Gen. 37.7-18; 41.14.

5 Exod. 3-14.

6 Josue 6.16-25.

7 Dan. 13.1-61.

8 Dan. 27-39.

9 Dan. 3.8-94.

10 Ps. 21.6.

11 Ps. 21.3.

12 Matt. 25.40.

and, just as He said: 'Why hast thou forsaken me?' so He said: 'He that receiveth you, receiveth me, and he that despiseth you, despiseth me.'¹³ Therefore, it shall not be reputed as folly in us, but we are to know that we ought to be Christians, not for the sake of that life in which God sometimes abandons us to the hands of persecutors, even unto death, but for the eternal life, because we see that this happens first in Him from whose name we are so called.

That is how it happened. Yet, how many wish to be Christians for no other reason than to enjoy happiness in this life, and, therefore, when that fails, they fall away. If such a glorious example had not been set by our very Head Himself, how should we have learned to despise earthly goods for heavenly ones, 'while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal'?¹⁴ Whom did He deign to transform into Himself by those words? Looking only at Himself, how could He have wished to be saved from that hour, who for that cause came unto that hour?¹⁵ Or how could He speak thus as if something were happening to Him against His will, when He had power to lay down His life, and to take it up again,¹⁶ and no man took it away from Him, but He Himself laid it down and took it up again, as He said in the Gospel? Beyond doubt, we were meant by those words, and our Head was speaking for His body, making no distinction in His words, because there was no disjoining of the bond of unity.

¹³ Cf. Luke 10.16.

¹⁴ 2 Cor. 4.18.

¹⁵ John 12.27.

¹⁶ John 10.18.

Chapter 12

Finally he continues in the psalm, and notice what he says in his prayer: 'For thou art he,' says he, 'who hast drawn me out of the womb; my hope from the breasts of my mother. I was cast upon thee from the womb; from my mother's womb thou art my God;'¹ as if he said: 'from and by one thing Thou hast drawn me into another thing, that Thou mightst be my good, instead of the earthly goods of this mortality, which fell to my lot from my mother's womb, because I sucked her breasts. For this is the oldness from which Thou hast drawn me, and those are the goods of carnal birth from which Thou art my hope; from them I turned to Thee.' 'And from the womb,' that is, from those things which I began in the womb, 'I was cast upon thee,' that is, passing over to Thee and trusting myself entirely to Thee. Therefore, 'from the womb of my mother,' that is, from the goods of the flesh, which I took up in the womb of my mother, 'thou art my God,' that from these Thou mayst be my good—this is expressed as if, for example, one were to say: 'from earth I make my abode in heaven,' that is, I pass from here to there. That is the nature of our transformation into Him when, through the grace of the New Testament, we change our life, passing from the old to the new. Signifying this change by the mystery of His Passion and Resurrection, He made His flesh change from mortality to immortality, but He did not change His life from old to new, because He had never lived in sin from which He might pass to holiness.

Although there are not lacking some who think² that this phrase, 'from the womb of my mother, thou art my God,' should necessarily apply to our Head Himself, since the Father is His God inasmuch as He is man, in the form of a

1 Ps. 21.10,11.

2 Ambrose, *De fide* 1.92.

servant, but not inasmuch as He is equal to Him in the form of God; therefore, 'from the womb of my mother thou art my God' is as if He said: 'from the time of my being made man, Thou art my God.' But what is the meaning of 'Thou hast drawn me out from the womb,' if it refers personally to Jesus, begotten of the Virgin? As if God did not draw out others, when all the process of birth is ruled by His providence! Or did he thereby wish to indicate the Virgin Birth, with its miraculous preservation of the Virgin's integrity, when he said: 'thou hast drawn me out from the womb,' so that what was miraculously effected there may not seem incredible to anyone, when God is said to have effected it? What, then, does the rest mean: 'my hope from the breasts of my mother'? How can this be referred to the Head of the Church Himself, as if His hope, which is in God, began at the breasts of His mother, and not before that in the womb? For, no other hope is to be understood than that by which it would come about that God would raise Him from the dead; obviously, all of this is said in reference to His having become man. The breasts of women are said to be disposed to productiveness by the very act of conception: did He, then, wish us to understand 'from the breasts' as if He said: 'from the time when I took flesh,' flesh for which immortality was to be hoped—not that He had this hope before, when He was in the form of God, in which there could be no change for the better—but 'from the breasts of my mother,' that is, from My taking flesh, which was conceived in hope, a hope that would be fulfilled when He passed from death to immortality?

But, as to the saying: 'I was cast upon thee from the womb,' I do not know how it could be applied to our Head, as if, while He was in the womb, He was not in God, 'in whom we live and move and are,'³ or as if the rational soul

³ Acts. 17.28.

of that Infant began to hope in God from the time when His flesh came forth from the womb. Unless, perhaps, we are to believe that a rational soul was added to Him at birth, but had been lacking to Him while He was still in His mother's womb; since the same soul which was added to the flesh at birth was united to God, therefore, according to that same flesh, we have to suppose the words were said: 'I was cast upon thee from the womb,' as if He said: 'From the womb I took possession of that soul, which was united to Thee.' But, who would dare to launch himself rashly upon this opinion, when the method of the coming or origin of the soul lies hid in such an abyss of nature, that it is better to seek it out always as long as we are in this life than at any time to assume that we have found it? However, from that transformation of ourselves into Him it has been explained how this can be understood. If anything more suitable could or can be said, we forejudge no one's conclusion, we envy no one's learning.

Chapter 13

Now, as to what follows: 'Depart not from me, for tribulation is very near,'¹ see how it sheds light on the meaning of 'Why hast thou forsaken me?' How does He forsake, to whom it is said: 'Depart not,' unless he forsakes the temporal happiness of the old life? But he is asked not to depart from nor abandon the hope of eternal life. What does he mean by 'for tribulation is very near?' as if His Passion as yet only threatened Him, although these words are understood as being said in the midst of the Passion, which was foretold of Him in this psalm. It is even going to say what was most plainly written in the Gospel: 'They parted my garments

¹ Ps. 21.12.

among them, and on my vesture they cast lots,'² which happened while He was hanging on the cross. Why, then, does He say: 'Tribulation is very near,' when He was in the midst of it? No doubt, He wishes us to understand that when the flesh is in sorrow and suffering, the mind, at the same time, has a great trial of patience, and it must make an effort and pray that it may not fail. Nothing is nearer to the soul than its own flesh. Therefore, whoever has a great and perfect contempt for this world does not suffer at all when he suffers elsewhere than in his flesh. For, he can give a reason on the spot when he loses his goods, that they are external to him, and they are indisputably far away from the mind of the wise man who is not attached to them by covetousness; he has no care about what he suffers because he does not really suffer. But, when he loses the precious goods of the body, that is, the life and health of the body, then tribulation is very near to the goods of the mind, over which it is inwardly master, as of the body. What has it to do with any explanation which will keep it from suffering when the body is wounded or burned, to which it is joined in such close partnership, that it can endure, but it cannot fail to suffer?

Therefore, the Devil, holding to this order of things, first took power over the external goods of that great man, whom he asked permission to tempt. When these had been taken away, and he saw him unmoved—for he had said: 'The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; as it hath pleased the Lord, so is it done, blessed be the name of the Lord,'³—then he asked permission to torment his flesh with a wound, entering into a conflict with him, in which he attacked his most intimate goods, that is, the goods of the body. When he had lost these, if he had yielded and turned his heart to

² John 19.24; Ps. 21.19.

³ Job 1.21.

irreverence, he would have lost the goods of the mind, also; it was to make him lose these that the tempter pressed upon him, cruelly tormenting his body. Finally, that man, beset by such a temptation, wherein tribulation was very near to the goods of his mind, although he speaks many things in prophecy, nevertheless speaks far otherwise than when he had lost those external goods, among which he had not so much lost his sons as sent them before him.

Thus, the soul of the martyr, transformed into Christ, when it begins to suffer tribulation in the flesh, and speaks to God by whom it is forsaken in its earthly happiness, but which is with Him in the hope of eternal life, says: 'Depart not from me, for tribulation is very near'; it is not in my land, not in my money, not in my flocks, not in my houses and walls, not in my bereavements, but in my flesh, to which I am joined, to which I am tied, whose consciousness I cannot be without; from there it presses on me very closely, to make me fall from the virtue of patience. 'Depart not from me, for there is none to help me,' neither friend, nor relative, nor human praise, nor the remembrance of past pleasure, nor any of those supports by which the flimsy foundation of earthly felicity is shored up, because, if Thou abandon him, what is the strength of man? 'For what is man that thou art mindful of him?'⁴

Chapter 14

'Many calves have surrounded me,' that is, the lesser folk; 'fat bulls have besieged me,' that is, the proud and rich, the princes of the people; 'they have opened their mouths against me,'—by crying 'crucify, crucify,'—'as a lion ravening and roaring.'¹ They seized and hurried Him along, leading Him

⁴ Ps. 8.5; Heb. 2.6.

¹ Ps. 21.13,14; Luke 23.21.

to the governor, and they roared by demanding His death. 'I am poured out like water,' as if all my persecutors had slipped and fallen upon me; 'all my bones are scattered.'² What are the bones but the foundation of the body, but the Body of Christ is the Church, and who but the Apostles are the foundation of the Church, who are elsewhere called 'pillars?'³ Certainly they were scattered when He was led to His Passion, or when He suffered and died. 'My heart is become like wax, melting in the midst of my bowels';⁴ it is indeed difficult to see how this can be applied to our Head, the preserver of His own Body, for this does not happen except in time of great fear, which makes the human heart melt like wax. But how could this happen in Him who had the power of taking up and laying down His life?⁵ Surely He took upon Himself the state of His weak brethren: either of those who tremble at the fear of death, as Peter himself, who fell into his frequent denials after his well-known presumption;⁶ or of those who waste away in wholesome sadness, again like the same same Peter, when 'he wept bitterly,'⁷— for sadness seems to melt the heart, for which reason it is called *lúpē* in Greek. But, more surely He wished us to understand a profound mystery, that under His word 'heart' He would signify His Scriptures, where His plan, formerly concealed, was revealed when He fulfilled by His suffering what had been foretold of Him. Therefore, His Scriptures were dissolved in those details which were carried into effect by His coming, His nativity, passion, resurrection, glorification. Does anyone fail to understand these things in the Prophets, now that they have come to the understanding even of the carnal multitude? Perhaps that is

2 Ps. 21.15.

3 Gal. 2.9.

4 Ps. 21.15.

5 John 10.18.

6 Matt. 26.69-95.

7 Matt. 26.75; Luke 22.6.

what He means by 'the midst of my bowels,' that is, in His body, which is the Church, the weaker crowd holds the place of the fleshly bowels. But, if the word 'bowels' applies rather to the innermost parts, it has been shown to belong preferably to those more expert in their understanding of the Scriptures; when His heart, that is, His Scriptures which contain His plan, is melted in their midst, that is, it is melted like wax in their thought, it is laid open, discussed, explained by the warmth of their spirit.

Chapter 15

'My strength is dried up like a potsherd.'¹ Pottery is hardened by fire; so the strength of Christ's Body is not consumed by fire like straw, but is hardened, like pottery, by the fire of His Passion, for 'the furnace trieth the potter's vessels,' as the Scripture says in another place, 'and the trial of affliction just men.'² 'And my tongue hath cleaved to my jaws.'³ It seems possible that His silence can be meant by this, which another Prophet praised when he said: 'He was dumb as a lamb before his shearer';⁴ but, if by His tongue we understand those in His Body, which is the Church, through whom His Gospel speaks, then they cleave to His jaws when they do not withdraw from His precepts.

As to the words that follow: 'and thou hast brought me down into the dust of death,'⁵ how shall they be applied to our Head, when His Body which rose on the third day was certainly not scattered into dust? The Apostles expressed themselves no differently, as we find in another place:

1 Ps. 21.16.

2 Eccli. 27.6.

3 Ps. 21.16.

4 Cf. Isa. 53.7.

5 Ps. 21.16.

‘Neither shalt thou give thy holy one to see corruption,’⁶ because His flesh, which rose so soon, was not corrupt. In the same way He says in another psalm: ‘What profit is there in my blood, whilst I go down to corruption? Shall dust confess to thee or declare thy truth?’⁷ saying this, no doubt, because if at death He had been scattered into dust, in the same manner as others, and if His flesh had been saved for the final resurrection, there would have been no profit in His Blood, because His death would have had no effect, and the truth of God, which had foretold that He would rise again speedily, would not have been preached. What, then, does He mean by ‘thou hast brought me down into the dust,’ unless we take His Body to be the Church, in which those who have suffered or are suffering for His name do not rise quickly as He did, but are brought down into the dust of death, to rise again when that time comes, spoken of in the Gospel: ‘The hour will come wherein all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth’?⁸ Or, surely, He wished the Jews themselves to be understood figuratively by the dust of death, for He was brought down into their hands, as it is written: ‘not so the wicked, not so; but like dust which the wind driveth from the face of the earth.’⁹

Chapter 16

Finally, it goes on: ‘For many dogs have encompassed me; the council of the malignant hath besieged me,’¹ as if He

6 Ps. 15.10; Act 2.27-31.

7 Ps. 29.10.

8 John 5.28,29.

9 Ps. 1.4.

1 Ps. 21.17.

spoke of them as the dust of death when He was brought down amongst them whom He calls 'many dogs,' and 'the council of the malignant,' naming them dogs, no doubt, because these often bark at harmless people with whom they have no acquaintance. And now, in the words which follow, there is a narrative like the Gospel; His crucifixion is described in it when it says: 'They have dug my hands and my feet; they have numbered all my bones; they have looked and stared upon me.'² For, His hands and feet were dug by the nails, and, when He was stretched upon the cross, His bones, in a sense, were numbered. He was looked and stared upon to see what would happen to Him, and whether Elias would come to save Him.³

What follows needs no explanation: 'They parted my garments amongst them, and upon my vesture they cast lots.'⁴ Then the words which are joined to these are pronounced by our Head praying in His own person, that is, as the Mediator of man, as well as in the person of His Body, which is the Church, which He calls His only one.⁵ 'But thou, O Lord,' He says, 'remove not thy help to a distance.'⁶ This refers to His flesh, whose resurrection was not delayed for a long time, as happens to others. 'Look towards my defence,'⁷ lest My enemies do me harm, seeming, as they do, to have some power by destroying My flesh. They do no harm if, by the protection of God's grace, the soul, which is in their power, does not consent to their evil doings; so also it was foretold elsewhere: 'The earth is given into the hand of the wicked,'⁸ that is, earthly flesh.

2 Ps. 21.17,18.

3 Matt. 27.49.

4 Ps. 21.19.

5 Ps. 21.21.

6 Ps. 21.20.

7 *Ibid.*

8 Job 9.24.

'Deliver my soul from the sword.'⁹ The *framea* is a sword, but, surely, Christ was not put to death by such a weapon but by a cross, and they did not pierce His side with a sword, but with a lance. Therefore, by the word 'sword' He means in another sense the tongue of His persecutors, as is said in another psalm: 'And their tongue a sharp sword.'¹⁰ Thus, because the tongue of detractors prevailed against His flesh, He prays that it may not harm His soul, when He says: 'Deliver my soul from the sword,' so that the prayer in this prophecy, if you refer it to the Head of the Body, is not to seem the request of one in need, but is, rather, a foreshadowing of something to come. Or, no doubt, because His Body, which is the Church, was going to suffer grievous persecutions, He spoke of the sword with which His martyrs were chiefly put to death, and He wishes their souls to be delivered so that they may not 'fear them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul,'¹¹ and may not consent to what is forbidden.

In what follows: 'My only one from the hand of the dog,'¹² it seems to me that this is more correctly understood of the Church alone. He calls the world a dog barking against unaccustomed truth, not for any reason, but out of habit. For this is the dogs' nature that they do not bark at those they know, whether they are good or bad, but are enraged by the sight of unknown persons, even harmless ones. But, 'in the hand of the dog' signified the power of the world, whose sovereignty would be a danger for His Body, that is, the Church, as He described it under the name of lion, in that passage which He added: 'Save me from the lion's mouth.'¹³ For this reason it is written: 'There is no difference between

9 Ps. 21.21.

10 Ps. 56.5.

11 Matt. 10.28.

12 Ps. 21.21.

13 Ps. 21.22.

the threats of a king and the anger of a lion,'¹⁴ although the Apostle Peter also compares the Devil to 'a roaring lion, going about seeking whom he may devour.'¹⁵ Then, showing how the proud of this world will be the enemies of lowly Christians, He says next: 'and my lowness from the horns of the unicorns.'¹⁶ Therefore, by unicorns the proud are obviously meant, because pride hates companionship, and every proud man aims, with all his might, to shine alone.

Chapter 17

Now, take note of where the fruit of this is found, that He was forsaken, lest He be heard in behalf of earthly happiness, so that it should not be reputed to Him as folly, but that we might learn what we ought to desire through the grace of the New Testament; or that He was not forsaken and was heard in the prayer He made: 'Depart not from me,' as He had said: 'Why hast thou forsaken me?' Certainly, this is contradictory unless the former phrase is referred to one thing and the latter to another. Take note and listen with all the intelligence you have; drink in, to your full capacity, and to the limit of my ability to explain so great a truth, or, rather, as far as He grants it who hears us: both in Christ as man, in so far as He is mediator between us and God,¹ and with Christ as God in so far as He is equal to God,² and 'able to do all things' as the Apostle says, 'more abundantly than we desire or understand,'³ see in this psalm the grace of the New Testament. See what is accomplished by the fruit of His aban-

¹⁴ Cf. Prov. 19.12.

¹⁵ 1 Peter 5.8.

¹⁶ Ps. 21.22.

¹ 1 Tim. 2.5.

² Phil. 2.6.

³ Eph. 3.20.

donment, suffering, prayer; what is taught, what is recommended to us, what is made clear. Behold what we read of as prophesied long ago, what we now see as fulfilled: 'I will declare thy name to my brethren,' he says, 'in the midst of the Church will I praise thee.'⁴ These are the brethren of whom He says in the Gospel: 'Go, tell my brethren.'⁵ That Church is the one which He just called His only one; as it is the only Catholic one, which is spread abroad plentifully through the whole world; which, as it grows, is extended to the faraway nations, of which He speaks in the Gospel: 'And this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony to all nations, and then shall the consummation come.'⁶

But, when He says: 'I will sing,' He refers to that new canticle, of which mention is made in another psalm: 'Sing ye to the Lord a new canticle, sing to the Lord all the earth.'⁷ You have here both points: the song He says He will sing, and the Church in whose midst He says He will sing it; the former passage refers to the new song, the latter to all the earth. Doubtless, He sings in us Himself, when we sing by His grace, as the Apostle says: 'Do you seek a proof of Christ that speaketh in me?'⁸ You may refer 'the midst of the Church' either to its prominence and to its manifestation, because things in general, in proportion as they are better known, are more commonly said to be 'in the midst'; or, surely, it may refer to the inner member of the Church, because the inner parts are middle parts. But, not everyone who sings with his lips sings a new canticle, but only the one who sings in the way advised by the Apostle, when he says: 'singing and making melody in your hearts to the

⁴ Ps. 21.23.

⁵ John 20.17.

⁶ Matt. 24.14.

⁷ Ps. 95.1.

⁸ 2 Cor. 13.3.

Lord.⁹ For this joy is within, where the voice of praise sings, and is heard; with this voice He is praised who is to be freely loved 'with the whole heart, the whole soul, the whole mind,'¹⁰ and who kindles His lover with love for Himself by the grace of the Holy Spirit. What else is the new canticle but the love of God?

Chapter 18

Then he follows up and shows this more clearly. For, when he had said: 'I will declare thy name to my brethren,'¹ because 'no man hath seen God at any time; but the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him,'² and had added: 'in the midst of the Church will I praise thee,' he at once showed how He sang, that is, that He sang in us when we make progress in His Name what he declared to his brethren, and what he sang in praise of God in us, saying: 'Ye that fear the Lord, praise him.'³ Now, who praises truly but he that loves sincerely? It is the same, then, as if he said: 'Ye that fear the Lord, love Him.' For, it is written: 'And he said to the man, behold the filial love that is wisdom.'⁴ Moreover, filial love is the worship of God, and He is not worshiped but by love. Therefore, the supreme and true wisdom is in that first commandment: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul';⁵ from this it follows that wisdom is love of God, which is 'poured forth in our hearts,'

⁹ Eph. 5.19.

¹⁰ Luke 10.27; Deut. 6.5.

¹ Ps. 21.23.

² John 1.18.

³ Ps. 21.24.

⁴ Cf. Job 28.28.

⁵ Matt. 23.37; Luke 10.27; Deut. 6.5.

not otherwise than 'by the Holy Ghost who is given to us.'⁶ But, 'the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,'⁷ and 'fear is not in charity, but perfect charity casteth out fear.'⁸ Therefore, fear, sent ahead into our hearts, drives out the habit of evil-doing, and saves a place for charity, but it leaves at once when the mistress comes to dwell there.

Therefore, ye that fear the Lord, praise Him, and that you may worship Him, not as slaves but as free men, learn to love Him whom you fear, and you will be able to praise what you love. The men of the Old Testament, fearing God, because of the letter which terrifies and kills, and not yet possessing 'the spirit which quickens,'⁹ ran to the Temple with sacrifices and offered up bloody victims, ignorant of what was foreshadowed by them, although they were a figure of the Blood to come, by which we have been redeemed. But now, in the grace of the New Testament, 'ye that fear the Lord, praise him.' Indeed, in another psalm where he foretells how those offerings, which were the shadow of things to come,¹⁰ were to be changed, he says: 'I will not take calves from thy hand, nor he-goats out of thy flocks.'¹¹ And a little later, in order to show forth the sacrifice of the New Testament, when those others were to come to an end, he says: 'Offer to God the sacrifice of praise, and pay thy vows to the most High.'¹² And at the end of the same psalm he says: 'The sacrifice of praise shall glorify me, and here is the way by which I will show him my salvation.'¹³ The salvation of God is Christ, and when the old man, Simeon, by the impulse of the Spirit, had recognized Him, then an infant,

⁶ Rom. 5.5.

⁷ Ps. 110.10.

⁸ 1 John 4.18.

⁹ 2 Cor. 3.6.

¹⁰ Col. 2.17.

¹¹ Cf. Ps. 49.9.

¹² Ps. 49.14.

¹³ Cf. Ps. 49.23.

and had taken Him into his arms, he said, 'Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word in peace, because my eyes have seen thy salvation.'¹⁴

Chapter 19

Therefore, 'Ye that fear the Lord, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob glorify him.'¹ He does not fail to add 'all,' because it would not be enough for him to say, 'seed of Jacob'; otherwise, this might be understood only of the Israelites who were to become believers. For, the seed of Jacob is the same as the seed of Abraham, and the Apostle speaks to all who believe in Christ, not only the faithful who had belonged to Israel, when he says: 'Then you are the seed of Abraham, heirs according to the promise.'² There he called attention to the foreshadowing of the New Testament, by what is written: 'In Isaac shall thy seed be called';³ not, therefore, in Ismael, the son of the bondwoman. The Apostle, writing to the Galatians, says that in these two sons of Abraham, the bond and the free, and the two women, the bondwoman and the free, we have the two Testaments prefigured in allegory;⁴ consequently, he says, 'not they that are the children of the flesh are the children of God, but they that are the children of the promise are accounted for the seed. For this is the word of promise: According to the time, I will come and Sara shall have a son.'⁵

It would take much too long to set forth in detail why the

¹⁴ Luke 2.27-30.

¹ Ps. 21.4.

² Gal. 3.29.

³ Gen. 12.12; Rom. 9.7.

⁴ Gal. 4.22-24.

⁵ Rom. 9.8,9; Gen. 18.10.

children of the promise, belonging to Isaac,⁶ are considered as belonging to the grace of the New Testament, but I shall touch upon it briefly, and you will gather more fruit from it by pondering on it more devoutly. God does not promise everything which He foretells, for He foretells even those things which He does not Himself perform, since He has foreknowledge of all future events. Thus, He foretells the sins of men which He can foreknow, but not commit. But He promises what He is going to do Himself: not evil, but good. For, who would promise evil? Although He brings evils upon evil-doers, these are not sins, but punishments; these He rather threatens than promises. He bestows all things and has foreknowledge of them, but He foretells sins, He threatens punishments, He promises bounties. Therefore, the sons of promise are the sons of His bounty. This is the grace which is freely given, not through the merits of the one who acts, but through the mercy of Him who gives.⁷ Hence, we give thanks to the Lord our God; this is the great act of worship in the sacrifice of the New Testament, and, when you have been baptized, you will learn where and when and how it is offered.

Chapter 20

Then he goes on and says: 'Let all the seed of Israel fear him.'¹ As Jacob and Israel are one and the same man with two names, what he said above: 'all the seed of Jacob,' he repeats in the following: 'all the seed of Israel.' This is no slight mystery, but in one book it is not possible for me to

⁶ Gal. 4.28.

⁷ Eph. 2.8,9.

¹ Ps. 21.25.

treat of everything; we have already made much progress, but we have not yet touched on the other three questions, that is, about the exterior darkness; the width and the length, the height and the depth; and of the two groups of five virgins. But why does he say above 'glorify him,' and, later, 'fear him'? Glorification belongs to praise, as when he said: 'Ye that fear the Lord, praise him,' as I explained at length. There, doubtless, is the love or charity of God, which when perfect casteth out fear.² Why, then, repeat: 'Let all the seed of Israel fear him?' 'For you have not received,' says the Apostle, 'the spirit of bondage again in fear.'³ But, the same Apostle enjoins fear on the wild olive engrafted on the olive tree,⁴ that is, the nations which were added to the root of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, that they might belong to the seed of Abraham.

The Lord Himself, at His meeting with the centurion, who from a Gentile became a believer, foretold in the Gospel the engrafting of the wild olive in place of the natural branches, which had been cut off because of their proud unbelief. He then said: 'Amen I say to you I have not found so great faith in Israel,' and He added: 'Therefore I say to you that many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into the exterior darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'⁵ Thus He signified that engrafting of the wild olive because of its humility—for, indeed, the centurion had said: 'I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof, but only say the word and my servant shall be healed,'⁶—and He indicated the breaking off of the natural

2 1 John 4.18.

3 Rom. 8.15.

4 Rom. 11.17-20.

5 Matt. 8.10-12.

6 Matt. 8.8.

branches, which was the obvious consequence of their pride: 'For they not knowing the justice of God and seeking to establish their own, have not submitted themselves to the justice of God.'⁷ Of these, swollen with their vain self-esteem, it is said that they shall go into exterior darkness, because, while boasting of themselves as the seed of Abraham, they refused to become the seed of Abraham, that they might be the children of promise, and because they did not receive the faith of the New Testament, where the justice of God is commended: 'seeking to establish their own.' Thus, as if trusting in their own merits and works, they scorned the children of promise, that is, the children of grace, the children of mercy 'that he that glorieth may glory in the Lord,'⁸ believing in Him 'who justifieth the ungodly,' that is, from ungodly He makes him a faithful son, that his faith 'may be reputed to justice,'⁹ and it is fulfilled in him, not because his merits call for it, but because it was promised by the Lord as His bounty.

Therefore, the Apostle, dealing with those who were engrafted to the olive tree by grace, say: 'Thou sayest: the branches were broken off that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, but do thou stand by faith, be not high-minded, but fear.'¹⁰ It is the bounty of God, not thy merit, as he says elsewhere: 'For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; for it is the gift of God, not of works, that no man may glory. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, in good works, which God hath prepared that we should walk in them.'¹¹ Thus, in this understanding of grace, there is fear, of which it is said: 'Be not high-minded, but fear.' But this

7 Rom. 10.3.

8 1 Cor. 1.31.

9 Rom. 4.5.

10 Cf. Rom. 11.19,20.

11 Eph. 2.8-10.

fear is different; it is not that servile fear which 'loveth out.'¹² By it we fear, so as not to fall into the torments of punishment, but by it we also fear so as not to lose the grace of His bounty.

Chapter 21

For this reason, although the Apostle is speaking to the faithful who belong to the New Testament, as I mentioned before: 'For you have not received the spirit of bondage again in fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption of sons whereby we cry Abba, Father,'¹ that is, that there may be in us 'faith that worketh by charity,'² not so much by fearing punishment as by loving justice; still, as the soul does not become just except by sharing in the better One who justifieth the ungodly—for what has it that it has not received?³—it ought not to glory as if it had not received it, by attributing to itself what comes from God. That is why it was said to him: 'Be not high-minded, but fear. And that fear is also commanded for those who live by faith,' and are heirs of the New Testament, being 'called unto liberty.'⁵ To be high-minded is another expression for being proud, as he shows clearly by contrast in another place where he says: 'Not minding high things, but consenting to the humble.'⁶ From the fact of his saying 'consenting to the humble,' he makes it quite clear that, when he said 'minding high things' he meant nothing else than being proud.

Fear, then, is not in charity, because 'perfect charity casteth

12 1 John 4.18.

1 Rom. 8.15.

2 Gal. 5.6.

3 1 Cor. 4.7.

4 Rom. 1.17; Gal. 3.11; Heb. 10.38; Hab. 2.4.

5 Gal. 5.13.

6 Rom. 12.16.

out fear,⁷ but that fear is a servile fear; it is the fear that makes anyone refrain from evil through dread of punishment, not for joy in holiness. Charity casts out this fear; a charity that finds no pleasure in evil-doing, even if it were suggested that no punishment would follow; but it does not cast out the fear by which the soul is afraid of losing that very grace which makes her take no pleasure in sinning, or the fear she has that God may forsake her, even though He afflicted her with no special penalty of suffering. This is a chaste fear; charity does not cast it out, but joins forces with it. Of it, certainly, the Scripture says: 'The fear of the Lord is chaste, enduring forever and ever.'⁸ He would surely not speak of it as enduring unless he knew of another which does not endure, and he does well to call it chaste, for the love by which the soul clings to God does not lack this fear, as he says in another psalm: 'Thou hast destroyed all them that are disloyal to thee; but it is good for me to stick close to my God.'⁹ The wife whose mind is false to her husband may not commit adultery, through fear of him, yet it is present in her will, though it does not issue into act. The chaste wife, on the other hand, fears differently, for she does fear her husband, but chastely; the former fears that her husband may come upon her in anger, the latter that he may go away hurt; to the unloving one it is her husband's presence that is hateful, to the loving one it is his absence. Therefore, 'let all the seed of Israel fear God' with the chaste fear which endures forever and ever; let them fear Him whom they love, not minding high things, but consenting to the humble; let them work out their salvation with fear and trembling, 'for it is God who worketh in you both to will and to accomplish, according to his good will.'¹⁰

7 1 John 4.18.

8 Cf. Ps. 18.10.

9 Ps. 72.27,28.

10 Phil. 2.12,13.

Chapter 22

This is the justice of God, this is what God gives to man when He justifies the ungodly; the proud Jews, 'not knowing the justice of God, and seeking to establish their own, have not subjected themselves to the justice of God';¹ because of this pride they are cast off that the humble wild olive may be engrafted, and they shall go into exterior darkness, where there shall be no chance of correction, since 'God is light, and in him there is no darkness';² but He is the light of the heart, not of those eyes which are in the flesh; nor is He at all such light as is brought to our mind by the image of this visible light. It is possible to see there, but far otherwise, far differently. For what kind of light is charity itself, and who can describe it in words? Which of those things which lie close to the bodily senses shows it by any proof? Perhaps charity is not light? Listen to the Apostle John, for he said what I have just now recalled, that 'God is light and in him there is no darkness'; and again he says: 'God is charity.'³ Thus, if God is light, and God is charity, then, surely, charity itself is light, which 'is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given to us.'⁴ Likewise he says: 'he that hateth his brother is [still] in darkness.'⁵ This is the darkness into which the Devil and his angels went because of their excess of pride. For, 'charity envieth not, is not puffed up,'⁶ and the reason why it envieth not is because it is not puffed up, for, where puffing-up precedes, envy follows, because pride is the mother of envy.

Therefore, the Devil and his angels, by turning from the

1 Rom. 10.3.

2 1 John 1.5.

3 1 John 4.8.

4 Rom. 5.5.

5 1 John 2.11.

6 1 Cor. 13.4.

light and warmth of charity, and going over to pride and envy, were benumbed as by an icy hardness. Therefore they are figuratively located in the north. Thus, while the Devil weighed down the human race, the future grace of the Saviour was spoken of in the Cantic of Canticles thus: 'Arise, O north wind, and come O south wind, blow through my garden and let the aromatical spices thereof flow.'⁷ Arise, thou who didst rush in, who dost weigh upon the conquered, who dost oppress those whom thou ownest, arise, that those whose souls thou hast pressed upon and bowed down may be relieved of thy weight and may lift up their heads. 'And come, O south wind,' he says, calling upon the spirit of grace, breathing from the south, as from a warm and luminous quarter, 'that the aromatical spices may flow.' Hence the Apostle says: 'We are the good odor of Christ in every place.'⁸ Hence, also, it says in another psalm: 'Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as a stream in the south;'⁹ doubtless, the captivity in which they were held under the Devil, as under the north wind, where they were chilled by abounding iniquity, and were, so to speak, frozen. Hence, also, the Gospel says: 'And because iniquity hath abounded, the charity of many shall grow cold.'¹⁰ But, truly, when the south wind blows, the ice is melted and the streams flow; that is, when their sins are forgiven the people flock to Christ by charity. Hence, also, it is written elsewhere: 'And thy sins are melted away as the ice in the fair, warm weather.'¹¹

7 Cant. 4.16.

8 2 Cor. 14.15.

9 Ps. 125.5.

10 Matt. 24.12.

11 Cf. Eccli. 3.17.

Chapter 23

Thus, the rational being, whether in the angelic spirit or in the human soul, is so constituted that it cannot be its own good, the source of its own happiness, but, if its changeable state is turned to the unchangeable good, it finds happiness; if it is turned away from it, it finds wretchedness. Its turning away is its sin; its turning toward God is its virtue. By nature, therefore, it is not evil, because the spiritual creation of rational life, even when it is deprived of the good whose possession makes it happy, that is, even when it is sinful, is superior to any corporeal being, even that which ranks highest among corporeal things, such as this light which is perceived by fleshly eyes, because it also is a corporeal thing. But, any incorporeal nature whatsoever is superior to any corporeal one, not in bulk, because bulk is found only in corporeal things, but in a certain force by which it rises above every image which the mind draws from the senses of the body, and makes an object of its thought. But, just as in bodies themselves the things which are inferior, like earth and water and even air, become better by sharing in what is better, that is, when they are illumined by light and stirred to life by warmth, so the incorporeal spiritual beings become better by sharing in the Creator by the purest and holiest charity; but, if they lose Him in any way, they will grow dark, so to speak, and hard.

Thus, men of unbelief are darkness. Those who turn to God by faith become light when He has first illumined them. If in their progress from faith they attain to sight, so as to deserve to behold what they believe, so far as such a good can be beheld, they will receive the perfected image of God; to such the Apostle says: 'You were heretofore darkness, but now light in the Lord.'¹ But, the Devil and his angels

¹ Eph. 5.8.

are exterior darkness to men of unbelief, and in greater degree as they have turned away from that charity, and have gone forth into their own pride and obstinacy. And, since at the Last Judgment Christ will say to those whom He sees at His left: 'Depart into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels,'² He will also say that those who are to be joined to those wicked spirits and condemned with them shall go into exterior darkness, that is, into the penal society of the Devil and his angels. What is said to the good servant is the opposite of this: 'Enter into the joy of thy lord,'³ so that this will be interior in proportion as that darkness is exterior. These things are not to be thought of by vain images such as places and distances, for only corporeal bulk occupies place and space. The spirit of life, the rational soul, is not like that, much less is God, the most gracious Creator of all things and their most just ruler. To draw near to such things or to be far from them, by will and affection, is what is meant by enter or depart.

But, because evil-doers delight in their evil, that is, in their dark deed, and the punishment of torture is to follow them, when the Lord says 'exterior darkness,' He adds also: 'there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth,'⁴ lest the wicked should madly think to have in that torture such pleasures as they enjoy here, when they turn to darkness by their unbelief and ungodliness; because, while choosing to act unjustly they make use of good things, but for not willing justice they shall be tormented by evils. Hence, exterior darkness can be understood as corporeal pains—since the body is exterior to the soul—granted that there are evils of the soul, in which it takes pleasure by turning from the light of charity to sin: outside darkness; but also evils of the

² Matt. 25.41.

³ Matt. 25.23.

⁴ Matt. 8.12.

body with which it will be eternally tormented to the end: exterior darkness; this is the only kind feared by those who are still involved in servile fear. For, if they were allowed without penalty to be involved and entangled in that outside darkness, which is in sin, surely they would never be willing to draw near to God, to be enlightened and to cling to Him by charity, where 'there is a chaste fear enduring forever and ever,'⁵ a fear which does not torment, but makes the soul cling more firmly to that good from which it falls if it lets go.

Chapter 24

'Let all the seed of Israel fear him,' and see the reason he adduces: 'because he hath not slighted,' he says, 'nor despised the supplication of the poor man.'¹ He calls the poor man humble, hence: 'Be not high-minded, but fear.'² Let, then, all the seed of Israel fear Him, because He has not despised the prayer of him who has not been high-minded but has feared. This can also be applied to our Head, because the Saviour of the body Himself, although rich, became poor for our sakes, that through His poverty we might become rich.³ In the form of a slave He became poor; in it He poured forth His prayer; in it, indeed, 'He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death.'⁴ See, then, why he says: 'because he hath not slighted nor despised the supplication of the poor man; neither hath he turned away his face from me.'⁵ Where is that 'Why hast thou forsaken me,' if He

5 Ps. 18.10.

1 Ps. 21.25.

2 Rom. 11.20.

3 2 Cor. 8.9.

4 Phil. 2.8.

5 Ps. 21.25.

has not turned away His face from Him, except that, in forsaking He does not forsake, when He does not hear prayers for temporal blessing, not to repute it to us as folly, but to make us understand what He takes away and what He offers us? So he says: 'he hath not slighted nor despised the supplication of the poor man; neither hath he turned away his face from me, and when I cried to him, he heard me.' Therefore, He did what a little before He was asked to do, when in His prayer He said: 'Depart not from me.' If, then, He heard Him, He manifestly did what was asked; therefore, He did not depart. Therefore, also, He did not forsake Him in this sense, although He did in another that we might better understand how we ought to wish not to be forsaken by Him.

'With thee is my praise.'⁶ What harm can they do who taunt me, as one overcome, that thou hast forsaken me in temporal blessings? 'In that great Church I will pay my vows to thee,'⁷ not such a one as that Synagogue which mocks at the death of the forsaken One, but in the great Church spread among all nations which believe in the resurrection of the One not forsaken. This is that only one which He asks to have saved from the hand of the dog, of which He spoke shortly before: 'in the midst of the church I will sing to thee,' and of which He now says: 'I will confess to thee'; among those, doubtless, who will also confess; among whom He also speaks. This is not so much a confession of sin as of the praise of God, as He says Himself in the Gospel: 'I confess to thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them to little ones.'⁸ Therefore, He goes on and says: 'I will pay my vows in the sight of them that fear

⁶ Ps. 21.26.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Matt. 11.25.

him. The poor shall eat and shall be filled, and they shall praise the Lord that seek him.⁹ They are the little ones of whom He said: 'and hast revealed them to little ones'; those who fear Him, the poor, that is, the lowly, who do not mind high things, but fear Him with a chaste fear, not the fear that trembles at punishment, but the one that aims to preserve His grace.

Obviously, He wishes his vows to be understood as the sacrifice of His body, which is the sacrament of the faithful. Therefore, when he said: 'I will pay my vows in the sight of them that fear him,' he at once added: 'The poor shall eat and shall be filled.' They shall be filled with the bread 'which cometh down from heaven,'¹⁰ that is, those who cling to Him, and who keep His peace and love by imitating His humility; therefore, the poor. In this poverty and fullness the Apostles were especially conspicuous. 'And they shall praise the Lord,' he says, 'that seek Him,' understanding that they are filled by no merits of their own but by His grace. For, they seek Him because they are not of the number of those who 'seek the things that are their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ's.'¹¹ Finally, even if the flesh of those who praise Him suffers temporal trouble or death, 'their hearts shall live forever and ever.'¹² This life of the heart is not seated in the senses of the body; it is in the secret light which is within, not in the darkness which is outside; in the end of the commandment, not in the beginning of sin. 'Now the end of the commandment is charity from a pure heart, and a good conscience, and an unfeigned faith,'¹³ 'charity which envieth not, is not puffed up,'¹⁴

9 Ps. 21.26,27.

10 John 6.50.

11 Phil. 2.21.

12 Ps. 21.27.

13 1 Tim. 1.5.

14 1 Cor. 13.4.

because it is not high-minded, but fears, and therefore it clings with a chaste fear enduring forever and ever. But, 'pride is the beginning of all sin';¹⁵ by it the Devil went irrevocably forth into exterior things, and by his envy cast man down, persuading him to seek the same. This man is thus addressed in a certain passage in Scripture: 'Why is earth and ashes proud, because while in his life he hath cast away his bowels?'¹⁶ 'In his life' is said as of his private and personal possession, in which all pride takes pleasure.

Chapter 25

For this reason, charity, which has more regard for the common good than for its own, is said 'not to seek the things that are its own.' By it their hearts live forever and ever, filled, as it were, with bread from heaven, of which the bountiful giver says: 'Except you shall eat my flesh and drink my blood, you shall not have life in you.'¹ Deservedly, then, will the hearts of those who are filled live forever and ever. For Christ is the life,² who dwells in their hearts, by faith now, but afterwards by sight. For, they 'see now through a glass in a dark manner, but then face to face.'³ Hence, this charity is practised now in the good works of love, by which it reaches out to give aid in whatever direction it can, and this is its breadth; at present, it bears adversity with long-suffering, and perseveres in what it holds as true, and this is its length; but it does all this in order to attain eternal life which is promised to it on high, and this is its height. This charity, indeed, is hidden in the place where

¹⁵ Eccli. 10.15.

¹⁶ Cf. Eccli. 10.9,10.

¹ Cf. John 6.54.

² John 11.25; Eph. 3.17; 2 Cor. 5.7.

³ 1 Cor. 13.12.

we are founded and, so to speak, rooted,⁴ where we do not search into the reasons for God's will, by whose grace we are saved. 'Not by the works of justice which we have done, but according to his mercy;'⁵ 'for of his own will hath he begotten us by the word of truth.'⁶ And this will of His is hidden. In his fear at what may be called the depth of this secret, the Apostle cries out: 'O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are his judgments, and how unsearchable his ways! for who hath known the mind of the Lord?'⁷ And this is the depth. Height⁸ is a term common to dimension up and down, but, when it is used for up, it commends the distinction of loftiness; when it means down, it bespeaks the difficulty of research and knowledge. Consequently, we say to God: 'O Lord how great are thy works! thy thoughts are exceeding deep,'⁹ and again: 'thy judgments are a great deep.'¹⁰ From this derives the passage of the Apostle which you listed among other points to be examined. 'For this cause,' he says, 'I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom all paternity in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened by his Spirit with might unto the inward man, that Christ may dwell by faith in your hearts; that being rooted and founded in charity, you may be able to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth, and length, and height, and depth; to know also the charity of Christ which surpasseth all knowledge, that you may be filled unto all the fulness of God.'¹¹

⁴ Eph. 3.18.

⁵ Tit. 3.5.

⁶ James 1.18.

⁷ Rom. 11.33,34.

⁸ *Altitudo* means vertical direction either up or down.

⁹ Ps. 91.6.

¹⁰ Ps. 35.7.

¹¹ Eph. 3.14-19.

Chapter 26

Pay attention to all these points carefully. 'For this cause,' he says, 'I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom all paternity in heaven and earth is named.' You ask, for what cause? He had said it above: 'Wherefore I pray you not to faint at my tribulations for you.'¹ This, then, he asks for them, that they may not faint at the tribulations of the Apostle, which he was bearing for them. And, that there might not be cause for them to faint, he follows up and says: 'that he would grant you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened by his Spirit with might.' These are the riches of which he says: 'O the depth of the riches!' For they have hidden causes where there are no previous merits of ours, and what have we that we have not received?² Then he continues and adds what he prays for: 'unto the inward man, that Christ may dwell by faith in your hearts.' This is the life of our hearts, by which we live forever, from the beginning by faith, to the goal of sight, 'that being rooted and founded in charity,' as he says, 'you may be able to comprehend with all the saints.' That is the bond of union of the same divine and heavenly commonwealth, by it the poor are filled, 'those who seek not the things that are their own but those that are Jesus Christ's,' that is, they do not pursue their own private interests, but the common weal, that is, the salvation of all; of this bread with which such souls are filled, the Apostle says in a certain passage: 'For we being many, are one bread, one body.'³ What, then, are we to comprehend? 'What is the breadth,' he says, as I have said, in good works, in which goodness extends even to loving our enemies; 'and the length,' that with long-

1 Eph. 3.13.

2 1 Cor. 4.7.

3 1 Cor. 10.17.

suffering they may be tolerated in proportion to this width of their injury; 'and the height,' that the eternal reward for these good works, which is on high, should be our hope, not any vain temporal blessing; 'and the depth,' from which comes the freely given grace of God, according to the secret and hidden decree of His will. There we are rooted, there we are founded; rooted, as in husbandry; founded as in building; and this does not come from man, as the same Apostle says, in another place: 'You are God's husbandry, you are God's building.'⁴ All this is accomplished when, in this our pilgrimage, 'faith worketh by charity.'⁵ But, in the life to come, charity full and perfect, with no evils to endure, does not believe by faith what it does not see, nor desire by hope what it does not possess, but will gaze forever upon the unchangeable face of Truth; its peaceful, unending occupation will be to praise what it loves and to love what it praises. Of this he says in the following: 'to know also the charity of Christ which surpasses all knowledge that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God.'

The figure of the cross appears in this mystery. For, He who died because He willed, died as He willed. Not without reason, therefore, did He choose this kind of death, nor would He have chosen it, except that in it He stood out as the master of this breadth and length and height and depth. For, there is breadth in that crossbeam which is fastened above; this refers to good works because the hands are stretched there. There is length in the visible part of the beam which stretches from that one down to the earth; for there, so to speak, He stands, that is, He remains and perseveres, which is the attribute of long-suffering. The height is in that part of the cross which extends above the transverse beam, and is left to point upward, that is, at

⁴ 1 Cor. 3.9.

⁵ Gal. 5.6.

the head of the Crucified, because the expection of those who hope rightly is above. And now, indeed, that part of the beam which does not appear, which is buried and hidden, from which the whole rises upward, signifies the depth of that freely given grace; there the minds of many are crushed as they try to fathom it, and at last these words are said to them: 'O man, who art thou that replest against God?'⁶

Therefore, the hearts of the poor that are filled will live forever and ever, that is, of the humble, burning with charity, seeking not their own but rejoicing in the company of the saints. This was first accomplished in the Apostles. In the part that follows, see what nations they gained by praising God, that is, by preaching the grace of God, since it is written: 'They shall praise the Lord that seek him.'⁷

Chapter 27

'All the ends of the earth shall remember,' he says, 'and shall be converted to the Lord, and all the kindreds of the gentiles shall adore in his sight; for the kingdom is the Lord's and he shall have dominion over all nations.'¹ He the mocked at, He the crucified, He the forsaken, wins this kingdom, and will deliver it at the end to God and the Father, without losing it Himself, for what He sowed in faith, when He came into the world as less than the Father, He will lead to the fulfillment of vision, in which as an equal He did not depart from the Father.² 'All the rich of the earth have eaten and have adored'³: 'by the rich of the earth' we have to understand the

6 Rom. 9.20.

7 Ps. 21.27.

1 Ps. 21.28,29.

2 1 Cor. 15.24; John 14.28; Phil. 2.6.

3 Cf. Ps. 21.30.

proud, if we were right in understanding the poor mentioned above as the humble, of whom the Gospel speaks, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,' and the same are 'the meek, those who mourn, and who thirst after justice, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peace-makers, and those who suffer persecution for justice' sake;⁴ to each of which statements individually it adds the attribute of blessedness. In an opposite sense, then, 'the rich of the earth' in this passage are to be understood as the proud. Not without reason is this distinction made, so that of the poor it is said above, 'the poor shall eat and shall be filled,' but here it says, 'all the rich of the earth have eaten and have adored.' It is true they have also been led to the table of Christ and they receive of His Body and Blood, but they adore only, they are not also filled, since they do not imitate Him. Though eating the Poor One, they disdain to be poor because 'Christ suffered for us leaving us an example, that we should follow his step.'⁵ But indeed because 'He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross,' the rich scorn Him and recoil from suffering the like; their swollen self-esteem is not greatness, their weakness is not health. But because 'God hath raised him up from the dead, and hath given him a name which is above all names, that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow of those that are in heaven, on earth and under the earth,'⁶ they are moved by the fame of His exalted position, and the glory of His name, spread everywhere throughout the Church, and they come of their own accord to His table, they eat and they adore; but they are not filled, because they do not hunger and thirst after justice; for only such will be filled. However,

4 Matt. 5.3-10.

5 1 Peter 2.21.

6 Cf. Phil. 2.8-10.

perfect satiety will come only in that eternal life when we have come from faith to sight, from the mirror to the face-to-face vision, from darkness to the clear truth.⁷ It is not inconsistent to say that he is filled with the poverty of Christ who, for the sake of His justice, that is, for the sake of partaking in the Divine Word, which he has begun here by faith, not only soberly despises all temporal goods, but even bears evil with patience.

Such were the fishermen and the tax-collectors, because 'the weak things of this world hath he chosen that he may confound the strong.'⁸ Of these it is said: 'the poor shall eat and shall be filled.' But, because they did not keep that fullness in themselves, but poured it out, so to speak, in praising the Lord, that is, those who seek Him have preached Him, 'those who do not seek the things that are their own,' but burn with love for Him; by their preaching the world has been stirred, so that 'all the ends of the earth remember and are converted to the Lord, and all the kindreds of the gentiles adore in his sight, for the kingdom is the Lord's and he shall have dominion over the nations.'⁹ By this enlargement of the Church, even the proud, that is, the rich ones of the earth, have been brought in to eat; although they are not filled, they adore. This is the order of thought maintained prophetically by the psalm in this place, and we see it fulfilled. It adds: 'all they that go down to the earth shall fall in his sight,'¹⁰ that is, none of those who love the goods of earth ascend into heaven. For, they do not do what the Apostle says: 'If you be risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God; mind the things that are above, not the things that are upon

7 2 Cor. 5.7; 1 Cor. 13.12.

8 1 Cor. 1.27.

9 Ps. 21.28-30.

10 Cf. Ps. 21.30.

the earth';¹¹ rather, the more earthly goods appear to them a source of happiness; the more they go down to the earth, that is, they are brought down to an earthly level. Therefore, they shall fall in His sight, that is, where He sees, not in the sight of men, who esteem them as high and exalted.

Chapter 28

'And to him my soul liveth,' he says; to Him naturally, not to itself, as is the case of the proud who delight in their own private good, and who recoil from the common good, which is God, with a kind of empty elation. Let us, then, avoid this, and let us seek to enjoy what is the common good of all rather than our own private good, that 'he who lives may not now live to himself,' as the Apostle says, but 'unto him who died for them, and rose again.'¹ It is thus He became our Mediator, to reconcile us to God by His humility, as we had strayed from Him by our accursed pride. What I quoted above is not the only thing written of that: 'Pride is the beginning of all sin'; we read this also: 'The beginning of pride is for men to fall off from God.'² Therefore, let no one live to himself, but to Christ, doing His will, not one's own, abiding in His love, as He did the will of His Father, and abode in His love.³ These, indeed, were His admonitions to us, these the exhortations expressed in His Gospel by His example. But if He, although in the form of God He was equal to the Father, nevertheless in the form of a servant, which He took for our sakes, proclaimed that He did the will of the Father, not His own, how much more should we

11 Col. 3.1,2.

1 2 Cor. 5.15.

2 Eccli. 10.15,14.

3 John 15.10.

despise our own personal and private will, which wraps us in darkness, and should approach to that common light that we may be enlightened, and that our faces may not be covered with confusion, for that light 'enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world,'⁴ that our soul may live to Him. This, also, he adds of us in the following: 'And my seed shall serve Him,'⁵ since 'He that soweth the good seed is the son of man; and the good seed are the children of the kingdom.'⁶

Chapter 29

Moreover, as all these things which have been said in this psalm form a prophecy of future happenings and do not refer to a present time, as is clear from the topics themselves, so the Psalmist wished to conclude it in a form which would show that he was not describing the present nor relating the past, but foretelling the future. 'There shall be declared to the Lord,' he says, 'a generation to come, and they shall show forth his justice to a people that shall be born, which the Lord hath made.'¹ He does not say: 'The Lord shall be declared to a generation to come,' but: 'there shall be declared to the Lord a generation to come.' However, this is not to be taken in the sense of something being declared to Him which He does not know, in order to enlighten Him, but is to be understood in the same way as the angels not only declare His benefits to us, but our prayers to Him. For, it is written, in a passage where an angel speaks to men: 'I offered the memory of your prayer,'² not that God finds out at that

⁴ John 1.9.

⁵ Ps. 21.31.

⁶ Matt. 13.37,38.

¹ Ps. 21.32.

² Cf. Tob. 12.12.

time what we wish or what we need—‘For your Father knoweth what is needful for you,’ said the Lord, ‘before you ask him’³—but because the rational creature, rendering homage to God, has need of presenting temporal petitions, whether to ask that something may be done for him, or to consult Him on what he should do; the soul grounded in piety does this, not to inform God, but to conform itself. For, this is also a sort of testimony on the part of a rational creature, that neither its own good nor the source of its own happiness is within itself, but that its good is in the Unchangeable by partaking of which it also becomes wise.

If it were expressed thus: ‘The generation to come shall be declared to the Lord,’ it would be the same as to say: ‘Those who declare it will please the Lord, not themselves,’ and so to declare to the Lord would be equivalent to living to the Lord.⁴ Thus it is said: ‘He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not.’⁵ But he adds to it: ‘and he giveth thanks to God,’ to show what it means: he does it to the Lord, that is, he does it to praise Him. For, then a good work is done rightly, then it is done justly, then it is done piously, when it is done to praise Him whose grace is granted that it may be done. Thus, if anyone wishes to understand these words, as if they were arranged to mean: ‘There shall be declared a generation to come for the Lord’—that is, a generation shall be declared which will come for the Lord, a generation, of course, of devout and holy souls because a generation of impious and wicked ones will not come for the Lord but for itself—that meaning is not remote from the original one, by which we understand that the soul shares in the same. This means that the rational creature, being subject to change, cannot

³ Matt. 6.8.

⁴ Rom. 14.8.

⁵ Rom. 14.6.

find happiness unless it changes from its own changeable good to that unchangeable one, which is likewise common to all, which is God, from whom it fell away by its impious pride, to whom it turns back in humble piety, to live in Him. As it makes progress in this affection, whatever good it does it does for the Lord, that is, for His praise, having received His grace to enable it to act; hence that act of thanksgiving which is performed in the innermost part of the mystery⁶ of the faithful.

Chapter 30

The part which follows, 'And they shall show forth his justice to a people that shall be born, which the Lord hath made,'¹ is a proof of the meaning given above. For, where it is said in that place: 'There shall be declared to the Lord a generation to come,' here it says: 'They shall show forth his justice.' Doubtless, that generation which was foretold as being about to come is made up of those who are pious and holy, with the justice of God, not their own, so as not to be of those who, 'not knowing the justice of God and seeking to establish their own, have not submitted to the justice of God.'² The justice of God pointed out in the words, 'not knowing the justice of God,' is that by which we become just, through His grace, that we may be His justice, when we live justly, believing in Him 'that justifieth the ungodly,'³ but not that eternal and unchangeable justice by which He is just. Therefore, that justice by which we become just through His gift is signified in that psalm where

6 The Sacrifice of the Mass.

1 Cf. Ps. 21.32.

2 Rom. 10.3.

3 Rom. 4.5.

it is written: 'Thy justice is as the mountains of God.'⁴ Obviously, the mountains of God are His saints, of whom it is said elsewhere: 'Let the mountains receive peace for thy people.'⁵ Many things are expressed in figurative speech about these mountains, but it would take too long to recall them here. But, as God performs this act of justifying men by an extremely secret judgment, which He does by a freely given grace—'and if by grace, it is not now by works, otherwise grace is no more grace,'⁶—doubtless, good works begin from the time of our justification, and we are not justified because good works came first; this is the 'depth' of which we spoke at length above. For, when he said in the same psalm: 'Thy justice is as the mountains of God,' he at once added: 'Thy judgments are a great deep.' Then he comes to the preservation which is common to men and beasts, and he says: 'Men and beasts thou wilt preserve, O Lord; how hast thou multiplied thy mercy, O God,'⁷ so that we may understand from it that eternal and immortal preservation of which the Apostle says: 'For we are saved by hope,'⁸ and likewise the fact that we receive the same which is common to men and beasts as a 'free gift, not of works, that no man may glory,'⁹ because we perform our good works as a result of that very justification. 'For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, in good works, which God hath prepared that we should walk in them.'¹⁰ Therefore, that salvation is freely given, as it is expressed in another psalm: 'Salvation is of the Lord, and thy blessing is upon thy people.'¹¹

4 Ps. 35.7.

5 Ps. 71.3.

6 Rom. 11.6.

7 Ps. 35.7,8.

8 Rom. 8.24.

9 Eph. 2.8,9.

10 Eph. 2.10.

11 Ps. 3.9.

So, then, just as when we read: 'Salvation is of the Lord,' we are not to understand that salvation by which the Lord is preserved, but that by which those are preserved whom He himself saves, so, when we read of the justice of God in this passage: 'Not knowing the justice of God and seeking to establish their own,' we are not to understand that justice by which God is just, but that by which men are just, whom His grace justifies. They are saved in the same way as they are made just, since, when He said: 'They that are in health need not a physician, but they that are ill,' He explained it at once by the words: 'I am not come to call the just but sinners.'¹² 'Not therefore by the works of justice which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the laver of regeneration.'¹³ This is a grace in which we are saved by hope. Consequently, this passage follows in that psalm: 'but the children of men shall put their trust under the covert of thy wings. They shall be inebriated by the plenty of thy house, and thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of thy pleasure. For with thee is the fountain of life, and in thy light we shall see light. Extend thy mercy to them that know thee, and thy justice to them that are right in heart.'¹⁴ Therefore, pride is contrary to this justice of God, because it puts its trust in its own works, and thus the psalm continues: 'Let not the foot of pride come to me.'¹⁵

This justice is the grace of the New Testament, by which the faithful are just, while they live by faith,¹⁶ until, by the perfection of justice, they are brought to the face-to-face vision, as they are also equally brought to immortality of the body itself, by the perfection of salvation. Hence, in another place the Apostle says: 'For Christ we are ambas-

¹² Matt. 9.12,13.

¹³ Tit. 3.5.

¹⁴ Ps. 35.8-11.

¹⁵ Ps. 35.12.

¹⁶ Rom. 1.17; Gal. 3.11; Heb. 10.38; Hab. 2.4.

sadors, God as it were exhorting by us, for Christ we beseech you, be reconciled to God,' and then he adds: 'Him that knew no sin, for us he hath made sin'—that is, a sacrifice for sin, for in that law offerings made for sin were called sin—'that we might be made the justice of God in him,'¹⁷ that is, in His Body, which is the Church, of which He is the Head; that we may be the justice of God, which 'they not knowing and seeking to establish their own'—that is, as if glorying in their own works—'have not submitted themselves to the justice of God.' Hence, also, when he had said in this psalm: 'They shall show forth thy justice,' he follows up and adds: 'to a people that shall be born, which the Lord hath made.' Is there any people, then, which the Lord has not made, seeing that they are men, since He created even the beasts; and all life, as well as all nature, has been made and created by Him? But this 'which the Lord hath made' is to be understood of their creation by Him as not only men, but also as just men, according to this passage from the Apostle, which I have quoted more than once: 'For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, in good works, which God hath prepared that we should walk in them.'

Chapter 31

Therefore, a warning is given to the instability of the rational soul, to make it know that it cannot be just, or saved, or wise, or happy, except by sharing in the unchangeable Good; that it cannot by its own will be its own good, but only its own evil. By its own will, indeed, it turns away from the unchanging Good, and becomes guilty by that act of turning away; it cannot be healed by its own effort, but only by the freely given mercy of its Creator, which

¹⁷ 2 Cor. 5.20,21.

has established it in the hope of eternal salvation while it lives by faith in this life. Hence, let it not be high-minded, but fear;¹ let it cling to God with that chaste fear, since He has purified it from its own uncleanness, as from a sort of spiritual fornication, which came from its inordinate love of inferior things; let it not be exalted by human praises, lest it be numbered among the foolish virgins, who took pleasure in the praises of others²—this is the last remaining one of your questions—and with those who do good for the sake of that same empty praise, not for the sake of their own conscience, of which God is witness. But, let it be counted among the wise virgins, where it may say what the Apostle said: ‘For our glory is this, the testimony of our conscience.’³ This it is to carry oil with them, not to buy it from those who sell, that is, the flatterers, for flatterers sell their praise like oil to the foolish. And of this oil the Psalmist says: ‘The just man shall correct me in mercy and shall reprove me, but let not the oil of the sinner fatten my head.’⁴ He chose to be rebuked in mercy by the just man, and, so to speak, to have his ears boxed, rather than to have his head swell with pride because he was praised by a sinner. This answer always seems to me a sort of mockery, when the wise virgins say to them: ‘Go you rather to them that sell and buy for yourselves,’ as it is written in one of the books of Wisdom, where it says to the mockers: ‘I also will laugh in your destruction.’⁵ But, that answer made to those who asked for oil, ‘lest perhaps there be not enough for us,’ was not said hopelessly but out of humility, for who could so presume on his own conscience as to be sure that in the judgment of God it could suffice for itself, unless He judges the merciful

1 Rom. 11.20.

2 Matt. 25.1-13.

3 2 Cor. 1.12.

4 Ps. 140.5.

5 Prov. 1.26.

with mercy? 'For judgment without mercy to him that hath not done mercy.'⁶ But, evidently, those lamps were lighted with good works, of which the Lord says: 'So let your good works shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.'⁷ The intention of the wise virgins has this object, that they wish their good works to be seen by men, not that they themselves may be praised by them, but that glory may be given to God, by whom they are enabled to do good works; thus, they rejoice in the interior good which is present to God, where their alms are in secret, that their Father who seeth in secret may repay them.⁸ Therefore, their lamps do not go out, because they are fed with this inner oil, that is, the intention of a good conscience, by which their good works which shine before men are done before God and for His glory. But, as for the foolish virgins, who do not carry this oil with them, that is, they do not continually shine with good works, their lamps go out when human praise is taken from them, because they did all their good works to gain that, making it their intention to be seen by men,⁹ not to glorify their Father who is in heaven. This intention is one of unending glory by which the soul knows that it belongs to God, that it has been justified in order to perform good works, and therefore loves to be praised in Him, not in itself. Hence, the man of God sings in another place: 'In the Lord my soul shall be praised,'¹⁰ 'that he that glorieth may glory in the Lord.'¹¹

6 James 2.13.

7 Cf. Matt. 5.16.

8 Matt. 6.4.

9 Matt. 5.15; 6.1.

10 Ps. 33.3.

11 1 Cor. 1.31; 2 Cor. 10.17; Jer. 9.24.

Chapter 32

But, how is it that in the same lesson of the Gospel it is written: 'And the bridegroom tarrying, they all slept'?¹ If we understand that sleep as caused by the delay of the Last Judgment, to which Christ is to come to judge, and the fact that, because iniquity has abounded, the charity of many grows cold,² how shall we put the wise virgins there, when they are rather of those of whom it is said: 'But he that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved'?³ It says 'they all slept,' because it is not only the foolish who do their good works for the sake of human praise, but also the wise who do them that God may be glorified, who experience that death; both kinds die. And that death is often spoken of in the Scripture as sleep, as the resurrection is called an awakening. Hence, the Apostle says: 'But I will not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that are asleep,'⁴ and in another place: 'of whom many remain until this present, and some are fallen asleep.'⁵ And other innumerable instances, unmistakably to this effect, are found throughout the Scriptures of both Testaments. On this, also, that great poet said: 'Sleep, the brother of death.'⁶ And, if you took note of it, you would find many passages in secular literature where death is compared to sleep. Therefore, the Lord signified that the time would come when, among the tribulations and temptations of this world, His coming would be looked for and hoped for, as something near and imminent, and those who seem to be of His family would prepare themselves for it. That is why He said that they went out to meet the

¹ Matt. 25.5.

² Matt. 24.12.

³ Matt. 24.13.

⁴ 1 Thess. 4.12.

⁵ 1 Cor. 15.6.

⁶ Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.278.

bridegroom and the bride; the bridegroom being the Son of God, and the bride a reference either to the fact that He will come in the body which He took from the Virgin, or that the Church herself will then appear, more glorious, so that the members of the universal body may flock together, and by their numbers her greatness will be shown.

Chapter 33

He called them virgins because of their chastity, and there are ten, that is, five and five, on account of the number of the bodily senses in which chastity resides, when they refrain from base and unlawful pleasures. The lamps, as we said, are good works, especially those connected with mercy, and that one which shines before men, praiseworthy conversation. But, it makes a great difference what intention the mind has in performing them; therefore, he says, 'some were wise and some foolish', and he distinguished them by this, that 'the foolish did not take oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels,' that is, in their hearts, where that participation in the innermost and supreme good is accomplished. Hence, in a certain psalm, where it says: 'Offer up the sacrifice of justice and trust in the Lord,' it also says: 'Many say: who showeth us good things?' Then, in order to show what good we should love when we exercise justice, that is, to offer up the sacrifice of justice, it says: 'the light of thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us, thou hast given gladness in my heart.'¹ With the intention of sharing more fully and more perfectly in this good, which has been partially experienced, the one who does his good works, and who converses with praise in the sight of men, has his oil with him and thus his good works, which shine even in the sight

1 Ps. 4.6,7.

of men, are not extinguished, because charity does not grow cold in his heart when iniquity abounds, but he perseveres to the end. The foolish virgins do not have this oil with them, because they attribute to themselves any good work they do, and for this reason are necessarily puffed up with pride; because of this vice they take pleasure in human praise, and it is with this joy that they seem to glow and shine, if they do anything good.

Chapter 34

'But the bridegroom tarrying, they all slept.' He will not come when he is looked for, but at midnight, when it is very dark; that is, it will be doubtful whether he will come. Hence it says: 'at midnight there was a cry made: Behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye forth to meet him.' Doubtless, that same cry is the trumpet which the Apostle mentions when he says: 'For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall rise again incorruptible.'¹ Under the name of trumpet he wants us to understand some very clear and prominent sign, which in another place he calls the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God.² In the Gospel, this is also spoken of as the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, which 'all that are in the graves shall hear, and shall come forth.'³ Therefore, all those virgins, both wise and foolish, rise and trim their lamps, that is, they prepare to give an account of their works.

But, with the utterance of that cry and the resurrection of the dead, all comfort of human praise shall be taken away, because there will be no doubt that the Judgment is now present and at hand. Then there will be no time to argue about that one, or to judge of another, or to do a favor

¹ 1 Cor. 15.52.

² 1 Thess. 4.15.

³ John 5.28,29.

or offer support to another; then 'everyone shall bear his own burden,'⁴ and will think about rendering an account of his own deeds. And then the mind of the foolish virgins will be carried along in its usual way, but it will fail because it will find no human praise. For, they did not faithfully say: 'With thee is my praise'⁵ or 'in the Lord shall my soul be praised,'⁶ nor did they glory in the Lord when, not knowing the justice of God, they established their own justice. For this reason they ask oil of the wise, that is, some consolation, but they neither find nor receive it, because the wise answer that they do not know whether they have enough even for themselves, according to their own conscience, by which they hope for mercy under that Judge, and 'when he shall sit upon his throne, who will boast that he has a chaste heart, or who will boast that he is pure of sin,'⁷ unless 'mercy exalteth itself above judgment?'⁸ This mercy will be upon those who have done the works of mercy with the intention of receiving mercy from Him from whom they know that they had received what they had, and did not glory as if they had not received it, or as if they had in themselves the power to please Him. This is what the foolish did, who took pleasure in themselves and in the good they did, as if it had originated in themselves; who were praised by flatterers and by those in error, as if they were something of themselves. 'But if any man think himself to be something, whereas he is nothing,' as the Apostle says, 'he deceiveth himself. But let everyone prove his own work, and so he shall have glory in himself only, and not in another.'⁹ This is to carry oil with oneself, not to depend on the praise of another. But, what glory will

4 Gal. 6.5.

5 Ps. 21.26.

6 Ps. 33.3.

7 Prov. 20.8,9 (Septuagint).

8 James 2.13.

9 Gal. 6.3,4.

he have in himself, if he does not have Him to whom it is said: 'My glory and the lifter up of my head,'¹⁰ so that, as we must often repeat: 'he that glorieth, may glory in the Lord'?

Therefore, the wisdom which dwells in the wise virgins, according to what was said before, when it spoke to the mockers and to those who refuse to receive sound doctrine: 'I also will laugh in your destruction,'¹¹ says to the foolish virgins: 'Go you rather to them that sell and buy for yourselves,' as if to say: 'Where are those who deluded you with lying promises, when you also deluded yourselves, because you gloried in yourselves and not in the Lord?' But it seems to me that these words, 'Whilst they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and they that were ready went in with him,' must be understood to mean that they will gape after empty glory with a depraved affection of heart, as they have pursued it with the pride of a vain mind. And that craving is indicated by this saying, 'Whilst they went to buy.' But the bridegroom came and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage, that is, those who bore true faith and true piety in their hearts, by which they could mingle with the number and company of the saints, who gloried not in themselves, but in the Lord. Thus they could enter with them into that joy of which it is written: 'Enter into the joy of thy Lord,'¹² where there will be a perfect participation in the unchangeable good, of which a kind of pledge is now held by faith, so that we may live according to this grace in so far as we live to God, not to ourselves.

10 Ps. 34.

11 Prov. 1.26.

12 Matt. 25.21.

Chapter 35

Then, in what follows: 'At last come also the other virgins saying: Lord, Lord, open to us,' it is not said that they had bought the oil, and had so come, for they had not the wherewithal, but that they had sought mercy too late, when the time of judgment was at hand, and the just were to be separated from the unjust. It is right for them to be answered: 'Amen, I say to you, I know you not', although, doubtless, He that says it knows everything; but this 'I know you not' is the same as 'You know me not, when you choose to trust in yourselves, rather than in me.' When we say that God knows us, we mean that He bestows on us a knowledge of Himself, to make us understand that not even our knowing God is to be attributed to ourselves, but that we owe such knowledge also to His mercy. Hence, when the Apostle said, in a certain passage: 'But now when you know God,' he corrected himself and said: 'or rather you are known by God,'¹ and what does he want us to understand but that He made them know Him? No one, however, knows God but he who understands that He is the supreme and unchangeable Good which makes us good when we share in it; this is expressed at the end of this psalm: 'They shall show forth his justice to a people that shall be born, which the Lord hath made,'² and also in these words in another psalm: 'He made us and not we ourselves.'³ This is not to be taken in the sense of the nature which we have as men, for of this nature, as of heaven and earth, and the stars and all living creatures, He is likewise the Creator, but it is rather to be referred to the Apostle's words: 'For we are

¹ Gal. 4.9.

² Ps. 21.32.

³ Ps. 99.3.

his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus in good deeds, which God hath prepared that we should walk in them.’⁴

Chapter 36

I think that these five questions of yours have been adequately answered by this sixth one of mine on which I have dwelt at length, which I set before myself, concerning the grace of the New Testament, for the sake of which ‘the Word was made flesh,’¹ that is, He who was the Son of God became man by taking our nature without giving up His own. This He did that we who were men and who receive Him might be given power to become the sons of God,² changed to something better by sharing in the unchangeable good, not for our temporal happiness, but for our adoption into eternal life, which is the sole happy life. I have chosen to go through this prophetic psalm, from its first verse, which recalls the Passion, showing how God forsakes us, and how in another sense He does not depart from us, how He gathers us to Himself for our eternal good, sometimes granting us temporal goods, sometimes taking them away, according as it is beneficial to us, so that we may learn not to cling to them, and thus despise the interior light which belongs to the new life—hence, also, that psalm ‘for the morning protection’³ receives its name as if for the new light. We are to learn, too, not willingly to dwell in the darkness outside, from which those who do not turn from outside to inside are cast into exterior darkness, that we

⁴ Eph. 2.10.

¹ John 1.14.

² John 1.12.

³ Ps. 21.1.

may not be punished by being associated with the Devil and his angels in the outermost damnation. Therefore, understanding it as our pilgrimage, we are crucified in this life, stretching out our hands to the breadth of good works, and by long-suffering persevering to the end, and having our hearts above, 'where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God,'⁴ and attributing all this not to ourselves but to the mercy of Him whose profound judgments weary out everyone who peers into them. This is not a vainly fictitious but a usefully true breadth and length and height and depth, whence we may attain to 'the charity of Christ which surpasseth all knowledge, that we may be filled unto all the fullness of God.'⁵

Chapter 37

I know that it was through no fruitless anxiety that I wished to take advantage of the question you proposed to me, to set before you more completely the grace of the New Testament. For, it has many enemies, who are troubled by its depth, and who do not wish to attribute to God the fact that they are good, but take the credit to themselves. And they are not the sort of men to earn your easy scorn, but they live temperately, and deserve praise, for their good works; they do not believe in a false Christ, as the Manichaeans and most other heretics do, but in the same true Christ, equal and co-eternal with the Father; they believe that He was truly made man and that He has come: they look for Him to come again; but they are men, 'not knowing the justice of God, and seeking to establish their own.' It was not without reason that the Lord, when He spoke of those who went in with Him to the marriage, and

⁴ Col. 3.1,2.

⁵ Eph. 3.18,19.

those whom He shut out, and to whom He answered: 'I know you not,' said that both sets were virgins because of their continence, and they were five because they had subdued the concupiscence of the flesh, endowed with its fivefold appeal to the senses; that both sets were furnished with lamps because of the very high praise gained by their good works and their good conversation in the sight of men; and that both groups were going out to meet the bridegroom because of the expectation with which the coming of Christ is hoped for. Nevertheless, He calls some wise and some foolish because the wise took oil with them in their vessels, but the foolish did not take any with them; He shows that they are alike in so much and unlike in this one detail; in this respect alone He gives them different and contrary names.

What, then, is so clearly joined as virgins and virgins, five and five, furnished with lamps, going out to meet the bridegroom, both these and those? And what so contrary as wise and foolish? Obviously, the distinction is that these took oil in their vessels, that is, they carry in their hearts an understanding of the grace of God, knowing that no one can be continent except God gives it, thinking that this also is a point of wisdom to know whose gift it is;¹ whereas those did not give thanks to the Giver of all good things, but 'became vain in their thoughts, and their foolish heart was darkened, and professing themselves to be wise,'² they became foolish. Certainly, we must not despair of them before we sleep, but, if they so slept when that cry was made, announcing that the bridegroom was at hand, and if upon awaking, that is rising up, they remained outside, not because they are not virgins, but because, not knowing whence they have what they are, they are foolish virgins, they will

¹ Wisd. 8.21.

² Rom. 1.21,22.

deserve to be shut out because they do not bring with them the love of interior grace.

Therefore, when you meet such persons, do not let them urge on you the emptiness of their vessels, but do you rather urge fullness on them. Hence, the Apostle says: 'If any man think that he knoweth anything, he doth not yet know as he ought to know,' and making clear at once what he has said, he goes on and says: 'But if any man love God, the same is known by him.'³ He did not intend to say 'He knows him,' but, by saying 'he is known by him,' he wished to convey to us more emphatically that our loving Him comes to us from Him. For, 'the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts,' not by ourselves, but 'by the Holy Spirit who is given to us.'⁴ But that man must necessarily love God too little who thinks that this good effect comes from himself, not from God. For, how could it be that such a one should glory not in himself, but in the Lord?⁵ He who glories in being good ought to glory in Him through whom he has become good; thus, if anyone thinks that he has become good by his own effort, it is inevitable that he should glory in himself, not in the Lord. But, the whole object of the grace of the New Testament, by which we raise our hearts on high, because 'every best gift and every perfect gift is from above,'⁶ is to keep us from being ungrateful, while the effect of the act of thanksgiving is that he who glories should glory in the Lord.

To my way of thinking, you have quite a lengthy book, but not a useless one. Love to read the sacred letters, and you will not find many things to ask of me. By reading and meditating, if you pray wholeheartedly to God, the Giver of all good things, you will learn all that is worth knowing,

³ 1 Cor. 8.2,3.

⁴ Rom. 5.5.

⁵ 1 Cor. 1.31.

⁶ James 1.17.

or at least you will learn more under His inspiration than through the instruction of any man. Although we approve the master who admonishes us from without, with that same unerring judgment, what other master than that interior light do we recognize as our own?

141. Silvanus¹ the Elder, Valentinus, Aurelius, Innocentius, Maximinus, Optatus, Augustine, Donatus and the other Bishops from the Council of Zerta² to the Donatists (June 14, 412)

As the rumor has been coming to our ears, with increasing frequency, of your bishops telling you that the judge³ was bribed to pronounce sentence against you, that you are ready to believe it, and therefore many of you are refusing to submit to the truth, we have decided, under the compulsion of the charity of the Lord, to bring to your attention this written account of our council, in order to warn you that your fellow sectaries, defeated and proved wrong, are spreading these lies among you. In their own formal acceptance, which they drew up before the Conference, and legalized by their names and signatures, they spoke of us as betrayers, and said we were

1 Silvanus: primate of Numidia; Valentinus: abbot at Hadrumetum (cf. Letters 214, 215); Aurelius: Archbishop of Carthage; Innocentius: a Numidian bishop; Maximinus: a converted Donatist, Bishop of Sinitus; Optatus: a Numidian bishop (cf. Letter 202); Donatus: a Numidian bishop, not the founder of Donatism.

2 Identified by some with Cirta or Constantina, but by others believed to be another town. The Numidian bishops met here in the year after the Conference of Carthage, and drew up this letter to inform the Donatist laity of the true results of the Conference. The Letter is a compendium of the treatise *Ad Donatistas post Collationem, or De unitate*. One of the results of this Council of Zerta was the return of the people of Cirta to the Church.

3 Marcellinus, who had been appointed arbiter at the Conference of Carthage, and had given a decision against the Donatists. Cf. Letter 133.

their persecutors,⁴ but they were unmasked and convicted of the most flagrant falsehood and deceit, when, in their eagerness to boast of the great number of their fellow bishops,⁵ they included the names of several who were absent, and even inserted the name of one who was dead. When an inquiry was made of his whereabouts, they were so dumb-founded by sudden embarrassment that they stated that he had died during his journey, and when they were asked how he was then able to sign his name at Carthage, they were even more violently confused, and entangled themselves in another lie by answering that he had died on the way home from Carthage. They were not able to evade this lie at all. These are the people you believed, either about the ancient story of betrayal, or about the bribery of the judge; while charging us with betrayal, they could not sign their own agreement without being involved in deceit. We have, therefore, thought it urgently necessary to include in this letter some selected facts in the form of a summary, lest you might not be able to have access to the great volumes of records, or might think it was too much trouble to read them.

We came to Carthage, your bishops and we, and we met together—something which yours had been refusing to do, saying that it was beneath their dignity. Seven representatives were chosen on each side, yours and ours, to speak in the name of all. Seven others on each side were chosen to act as advisers, when the need should arise. Then, four on each side were named to watch over the writing of the records, so that no one could say they had been tampered with in any way. Besides that, four stenographers were allotted from each side, by us and by them, to take their turns, two and two, with the

⁴ Cf. Letter 129.

⁵ They had wanted to have all their bishops present at the Conference, hoping to overawe the arbiter, Marcellinus, by force of numbers, but the preliminary agreement called for delegates only from each side.

judge's secretaries, so that no one of us could allege that he had said something which had not been taken down. In addition to these great precautions, it was agreed that we and they should sign our names to what we said just as the judge did, so that no one could say that anything in those records had been changed afterward. When those same records have been published in all the places where they should be published, while those who signed them are still alive, then, indeed, the truth will be confirmed to our descendants and will endure. Do not, then, be ungrateful to the great mercy of God, which has been exercised toward you by that care; no excuse is now left to you, but the hearts of the men who resist this clear evidence of truth are hard and diabolical beyond measure.

Look, now, at the bishops of your sect, whom all had chosen to speak in the name of all, trying with might and main, to prevent the hearing of the case, which had brought to Carthage such a great number of bishops on both sides, from all over Africa, and from such faraway places. While every soul was waiting in suspense to see what was to be discussed in the great assembly, they insisted vehemently that nothing should be discussed. What other reason was there for this except that they knew they had a bad case, and they could not doubt that they would easily be beaten if it came to a trial? This very disposition of theirs, which feared to let the case be tried, showed that they had already lost it. If they had got what they wanted, that the conference should not be held, and that the truth should not be brought out by our arguments, what answer were they to give you when they returned from Carthage? What proofs would they bring? I imagine they were going to produce the minutes of the meeting and say to you: 'We insisted on the case not being tried; they insisted on its being tried. You are waiting to see what we accomplished. Here it is; read where we carried the day against them, that

we should not take up the case.' Probably you would answer, if you had sense: 'You will drop the case to give them an advantage?' or, rather: 'Why did you come back if you accomplished nothing?'

Finally, when they failed to carry what they had attempted, namely, to prevent the case from being heard, the trial itself showed what they feared when they were beaten on every count. For they admitted that they had nothing to say against the Catholic Church, which is spread throughout the whole world, because they were overwhelmed by the divine testimony of the holy Scriptures, which describe how the Church, beginning from Jerusalem, increased throughout the places in which the Apostles preached.⁶ They also wrote the names of those same places in their Epistles and Acts, and from there the Church spread among other nations. Against that Church they admitted openly that they had no case, and there our victory in God's Name was most evident. For, when they agree to the Church with which we are in communion, but they are manifestly not, they testify that they were long ago beaten; they make known to you very openly, if you are wise, what you ought to give up and what to hold, not in that state of falsity, in which they do not shrink from lying to you even now, but in that truth which they have been forced by defeat to confess.

Whoever, therefore, shall be separated from this Catholic Church by this single sin of being severed from the unity of Christ, no matter how estimable a life he may imagine he is living, shall not have life, but the anger of God rests upon him. On the other hand, whoever lives a good life in this Church suffers no harm from the sins of others, because, as the Apostle says: 'Everyone shall bear his own burden,'⁷ and, whoever in it eateth the Body of Christ 'unworthily, eateth and drinketh

⁶ Luke 24.47.

⁷ Gal. 6.5.

judgment to himself';⁸ for the Apostle himself also wrote this. Thus, when he says 'eateth judgment to himself,' he shows plainly that he does not eat judgment to another, but to himself. This we have treated of, and proved and held, that the communion of the wicked does not defile anyone else by his participation in the sacraments, but by his consent to the evil deeds. But, if no one consents to his evil deeds, the evil man carries his own case and plays his own part; he does not harm any other, unless he has this one as a partner in his guilt by consent to the evil deed.

They were even forced to agree to this in the most open terms, not at the time when we were discussing these matters, but later, when another point was being treated. For, when we had come to the case of Caecilian,⁹ which we distinguished from the case of the Church, so that, if he were found in the wrong, we could condemn him without thereby leaving the Church, since he could not harm the Church by his own bad case—as I said, when we had come to that case of Caecilian, and they had read of the Council of Carthage,¹⁰ where they read aloud the verdict of seventy bishops, more or less, passed against the absent Caecilian, we answered them that that council of bishops did not harm the absent Caecilian any more than one of even more bishops of the Donatist sect¹¹ harmed the absent Primian,¹² when one hundred bishops, more or less, condemned him in the case of Maximian.¹³ When the case of Maximian was mentioned, for they knew that they had received back with unimpaired rank those whom they had condemned, and that they had accepted as genuine the baptism administered in the sacrilegious schism of Maximian, and had not invalidated it, and that in their

⁸ 1 Cor. 11.29.

⁹ Cf. Letters 105, 108.

¹⁰ Held by a dissident faction in 311.

¹¹ This Council of the Maximianists was held at Cabarsu in 393.

¹² Cf. Letter 108.

¹³ Cf. *Contra Crescentium* 8.20.

own decree at Bagai¹⁴ in which they had condemned them they had given a period of grace to several who were involved in that schism, and had said that the sacrilegious twigs of Maximian did not corrupt the young trees—to resume, when that case struck their ears, they were frightened and disturbed, and, forgetting the objection they made to us before, they immediately said: ‘One case does not bring guilt on another, nor one person on another.’ Then by their words they strengthened what we had been saying previously about the Church, that neither the Church overseas, against which they admitted they had nothing to say, nor even the Catholic Church in Africa, which is joined to the former by the bond of unity, could be injured by the case and person of Maximian, whatever kind of man he was: if Maximian who condemned Primian with his followers, if even Felician¹⁵ who condemned Primian at the same time, and afterward was condemned with Primian as a partisan of the Donatist sect does not bring guilt on the Donatist sect, into which he was received back as a bishop, as he had been before; and if even Maximian, with his partisans, does not bring guilt on those to whom they gave a period of grace, saying that they were not defiled by the ones with whom they had been, then one case does not bring guilt on another, nor one person on another.

What more, then, do you want? They filled the records with many useless words, and, since they did not succeed in preventing the case from being heard, by speaking at length they accomplished this one object, that of making it hard to read what was decided. But these few words of theirs ought to be enough to keep you from hating the unity of the Catholic Church, because, as they said, handed down and signed, one case does not bring guilt on another, nor one person on

14 The Council of Bagai was held in 394.

15 One of the consecrators of Maximian, who was received back by the Donatists without loss of rank.

another. For, in that very case of Caecilian, which, although the cause of the Church was not involved in it, we undertook to defend, so as to unmask even there their lying charges, they were very evidently defeated, and were able to prove none of the charges which they alleged against Caecilian. Besides that, we brought out the episcopal records on the question of the charges of betrayal, and from them we read that several of those bishops who had pronounced sentence against the absent Caecilian had themselves been proved betrayers. They had no answer to make against the records, so they said they were forged—but they had no way of proving that.

In addition to that they admitted, or, rather, made it a matter of great glory to proclaim, that it was their predecessors who accused Caecilian to Emperor Constantine, and they added the lie that he had been condemned by the emperor because of their accusations. See now how they have lost their case, in the very point in which they are accustomed to spread the clouds of error around you, stirring up ill feeling against us and making us objects of hatred to you, because we bring the cause of the Church before the emperors. And lo! their predecessors, whose names they boast of, brought their case before the emperor; they prosecuted their charges against Caecilian before the emperor; they said he was condemned! Do not let them mislead you with their utterly unfounded and deceitful words; enter into your hearts; fear the Lord; reflect upon truth; abandon falsehood. Whatever you may have suffered thus far as a result of the imperial laws—and you suffer for your wrong-doing, not for justice' sake—you cannot say that we are acting unjustly, that you should not have been so treated, and that the emperor had no right to restrain you from your evil deeds. Your own bishops have admitted that they dealt with Caecilian the very way you yourselves do not want to be dealt with. Yet, it was a well-known fact, on

their own admission and deposition, that they prosecuted Caecilian before the emperor, but that Caecilian was condemned by the emperor was anything but a well-known fact. On the contrary, it was a fact that, when their predecessors accused and prosecuted him, he was first cleared twice in succession¹⁶ by the bishops, and afterward by the emperor himself. They themselves confirmed the truth of this by offering such facts later as an argument for their side, but the very incidents which they offered were found to be against them and were read as a defense of Caecilian. They could offer no reliable proofs against any whom they accused, but whatever we said in defense of the Church or of Caecilian they confirmed as true by their own words and their own readings.

First, they brought out the volume of Optatus,¹⁷ as if they could prove from it that Caecilian had been condemned by the emperor. But, when this book was read, it turned out to be against them and showed, rather, that Caecilian had been acquitted; whereupon everybody laughed at them. But, as that laugh could not be taken down by the secretaries, they testified in their own words in the records that they had been laughed at. Then, they brought and read a document presented by their predecessors to Emperor Constantine, in which they complained that the said emperor was grievously persecuting them, and so, by that very document, they showed that they had lost their case with the emperor against Caecilian, and that what they said was not true: that he had been condemned by the emperor. Thirdly, they produced a letter from the same Constantine, addressed to his deputy Verinus, in which he denounced them severely and said that they should be released from exile and delivered to his wrath, because God had now

¹⁶ In trials held at Rome and at Arles.

¹⁷ St. Optatus, Bishop of Milevis, who wrote *De schismate Donatistarum* about 366.

begun to avenge Himself on them. Thus, by that very letter of the emperor they proved that they had spoken falsely in saying that Caecilian was condemned by the emperor, whereas the emperor let it be known that they had been worsted by Caecilian, seeing that he so vigorously execrated them, when he ordered them to be released from exile that they might be punished as they had begun to be by the judgment of God.

After this, they threw the case of Felix of Aptunga¹⁸ into the middle of the discussion, saying that the same Felix, by whom Caecilian was ordained, had been a betrayer, and they produced a letter from the same Emperor Constantine—which was in Caecilian's favor and against them—in which he wrote to the governor ordering Ingentius¹⁹ to be sent to his court. But the same Ingentius had confessed at the hearing held by the governor, Aelian,²⁰ that he had committed a calumnious act against Felix, the ordainer of Caecilian. Thereupon, they said that the reason why the emperor had wanted to have Ingentius sent to him was because the case of Caecilian at that point depended on his testimony, and they tried to introduce the vainest kind of conjecture, to the effect that, after Ingentius had been escorted to the imperial court, the emperor proceeded to give judgment against Caecilian, and that by his later verdict he thereby revoked that sentence which we had read, in which he had decided between the contending parties, and had exonerated Caecilian. They were told to read the document containing this, and, of course, they had nothing to show. But that letter of the emperor which they had quoted as being against them and for Caecilian contains this statement: that Aelian, the governor, held a

18 Cf. Letters 43,88,93.

19 Confessed writer of the forged letter supposed to prove the guilt of Caecilian.

20 Proconsul or governor of Numidia, deligated by the emperor to examine the Donatist charges against Felix.

legal hearing on the case of Felix, and made it clear that the same Felix was innocent of the charge of betrayal, but that he ordered Ingentius to be transferred to his own court, so that he might be able to appear and to make known to those who were there, and who kept interrupting him day after day, that it was useless for them to try to rouse hatred against Caecilian, and to stir up such violence against him.

Would anyone believe that they actually quoted those passages favoring us and damaging themselves, if it were not that almighty God brought it about by His design so that not only should their words be included in the records, but even the signatures of those who signed should be read there? If anyone looks carefully at the succession of consuls and dates, as it is set down in the records, he will find, first of all, that Caecilian was acquitted by the verdict of the bishops. Next, the case of Felix of Aptunga was examined by the governor, Aelian, not long after this, and it was stated that he was innocent. In this case, Ingentius was summoned to the imperial court, and a long time afterward the emperor himself decided between the contending parties, and made an end of it. In that investigation he judged Caecilian innocent and his accusers perjurers. In that succession of consuls and dates it is clearly shown that they spoke falsely when they said that the emperor had changed his verdict after summoning Ingentius to court, and that he afterward condemned Caecilian whom he had previously acquitted. But they were able to quote nothing to this effect; on the contrary, they read much that was damaging to themselves, and they are clearly proved wrong by the succession of consuls, which shows that the case of Felix was concluded by the proconsular verdict, in which Ingentius was summoned to the court, and that it was not after a short interval, but a long time, that Caecilian was cleared at the hearing held by the said emperor between the contending parties.

Let them not tell you, then, that we bribed the judge. What else do men usually say when they have lost their case? But, if we did not give anything to the judge to make him decide for us and against you, what did we give them to make them not only say but even quote such weighty things for us and against themselves? Or do they, perhaps, want us to thank them in your presence, because although, according to them, we paid the judge, they gave us all that for nothing when they both said and read so much that favored us and hurt them? Or surely, if they say that they won over us because they pleaded the cause of Caecilian better than we did, you may confidently believe them in that, for we had thought that two quotations were enough for him, but they produced four.

But why burden you with a longer letter? If you are willing to believe us, believe, and let us hold together to the unity which God commands and loves. If you are not willing to believe us, read the records, or allow them to be read to you, and prove for yourselves whether what we have written is true. But, if you will do neither of these things, and you still wish to follow the false teaching of the Donatist sect, convicted by the most evident truth, we are guiltless of your punishment, and you will repent too late. If you do not despise what God offers you, and if, after a case so carefully tried and so carefully published, you abandon your accustomed perversity, and agree to the peace and unity of Christ, we shall rejoice in your conversion, and the sacraments which you possess to your damnation in the sacrilege of schism will be helpful and salutary to you when you possess your Head, Christ, in the Catholic peace, where 'Charity covereth a multitude of sins.'²¹

We have written this to you on the fourteenth day of June, in the ninth consulship of the most revered Emperor Honorius, so that this letter may reach some of you as soon as possible.

²¹ Eph. 4.15; 5.23; Col. 1.18; 1 Peter 4.8.

142. *Augustine, bishop, gives greeting in the Lord to the beloved lords, his brother priests, Saturninus and Eufrata,¹ and the clerics who have been converted with you to the unity and peace of Christ (412)*

Your coming has given us joy, but do not let our absence cause you sadness. For we are in that Church, which, by the favor of God, although spread abroad everywhere, and extending throughout the whole world, is nevertheless one great body of one great head, and this Head is its very Saviour, as the Apostle says.² Of the glorification of this Head, which was to take place after His resurrection, the Prophet had spoken long before: 'Be thou exalted, O God, above the heaven,'³ and because by His exaltation above the heavens His Church was destined to fill the whole earth with an abundant fruitfulness, the same psalm added immediately: 'and thy glory above the earth.' Therefore, beloved, with assured mind and steadfast heart, let us continue to live under so lofty a Head in so glorious a body, in which we are mutually members. Thus, even if my absence were as far as the most distant lands, we should be together in Him, and we should never withdraw from the unity of His body. If we lived in one house, we should certainly be said to be together; how much more are we together when we are together in one body! Truth testifies that we are in one house, since the holy Scripture, which says that the Church is the body of Christ, likewise says that the same Church is the house of God.⁴

This house is not built in one corner of the world, but over the whole earth. Therefore, that psalm in whose title we read: 'When the house was built after the captivity' begins

¹ The conversion of these Donatist priests was among the fruits of the Conference of Carthage.

² Eph. 5.23; Col. 1.18.

³ Ps. 56.12.

⁴ 1 Tim. 3.15.

thus: 'Sing ye to the Lord a new canticle, sing to the Lord all the earth.'⁵ In the oldness of the old man, the Devil had taken the world captive, but, when the house is built after the captivity, the renewal of the faithful is shown forth in the new man. Hence, the Apostle says: 'Put off the old man, . . . and put on the new man, who is created according to God.'⁶ And because this takes place over the whole earth in Catholic unity, as it says in another psalm: 'and thy glory above all the earth,'⁷ so in this one, when it is said: 'Sing ye to the Lord a new canticle,' in order to show when the house is built in that new canticle, it adds immediately: 'sing to the Lord all the earth.' And the same psalm exhorts the workmen by whom so great a house is built when it continues and says: 'Show forth his salvation from day to day; declare his glory among the gentiles, his wonders among all peoples.' And shortly after, it says: 'Bring ye to the Lord, O ye kindreds of the gentiles, bring ye to the Lord glory and honor.'⁸

Through these and similar testimonies of this great house, which are found in such numbers through the whole of Scripture, its enemies have so far given ground as to admit that they have nothing against the Church overseas, which they nevertheless agree is Catholic. We are in communion with this Church, and hence deserve to be joined to the members of Christ, and we embrace the structure of His body with a sentiment of most faithful charity.⁹ And since he who lives a bad life in the unity of this Church 'Eateth and drinketh judgment to himself,'¹⁰ as the Apostle says, so, when anyone lives a good life there, another's cause, another's person bring no guilt upon him, as even they were forced to

5 Ps. 95.1.

6 Eph. 4.22-24.

7 Ps. 56.12.

8 Ps. 95.2,3,7.

9 Goldbacher indicates a lacuna in the text at this point; the suggested emendation has been followed in the translation.

10 1 Cor. 11.29.

admit with their own lips when the case of Maximian¹¹ was pressed upon them, because 'one case does not bring guilt upon another, nor one person upon another.'¹² Still, we feel concern for each other, as members of one body, and those of us who belong, by the Lord's help, to the granary in the life to come meantime bear with the chaff on the threshing-floor, and, because it is destined for the fire at some future time, we do not for that abandon the Lord's threshing-floor.¹³

Perform your duties in the Church faithfully and joyfully, as they fall to your lot according to your rank, and fulfill your ministry¹⁴ with uprightness, because of that God under whom we are fellow servants and to whom we understand that we shall render an account of our actions. Therefore, the bowels of His mercy ought to abound in us, because 'Judgment without mercy to him that hath not done mercy.'¹⁵ For this reason pray with us for those who still cause us sadness,¹⁶ that the sickness of their carnal mind, intensified and concentrated by long custom, may be healed.¹⁷ For, who does not understand 'how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity'¹⁸ if that pleasure touches a palate from which the mind has spit out all the bitterness of division, and which loves the sweetness of charity? The God to whom we pray for them is powerful and merciful enough to use any sort of occasion to draw them even now to salvation. May the Lord preserve you in peace.

11 Cf. Letter 141.

12 *Ibid.*

13 Matt. 3.12; Luke 3.17.

14 2 Tim. 4.5.

15 James 2.13.

16 Not all the Donatists were converted by the Conference of Carthage, and the recalcitrant ones made ample trouble for the Church for some time.

17 There is another lacuna in the text here. The emended version has been followed.

18 Ps. 132.1.

143. *Augustine gives greeting in the Lord to the excellent lord,
his deservedly distinguished and very dear son,
Marcellinus¹ (412)*

I received your letter through the kindness of my holy brother and fellow bishop, Boniface,² but, when I went to look for it to answer it, I could not find it. However, I remembered that you asked in it how, when all the water of Egypt was turned into blood, the magicians of Pharaoh found any with which they could do in like manner.³ This difficulty is usually solved in two ways. They did it either because some sea water could be brought, or, what is more likely, because in that part of the country where the children of Israel were those plagues did not take place. In certain passages of that Scripture⁴ this is very clearly expressed, and it warns us what is to be understood even when it is not expressed.

That letter of yours which the priest Urban⁵ brought has in it a question drawn, not from the sacred books, but from my own, which I wrote on the freedom of the will.⁶ On questions of this sort I do not expend much effort, because, if my opinion cannot be defended by pure reason, it is still mine, not that of an Author whose meaning it is forbidden to censure, even though, by failing to understand it, one holds an opinion which is worthy of censure. Therefore I admit that I try to be of the number of those who write by advancing in knowledge, and advance by writing. Consequently, if I have set down anything with insufficient care or knowledge which is objected to, not only by others who are able to see it, but

¹ Cf. Letters 133, 136, 138.

² Bishop of Cataqua.

³ Exod. 7.20-22.

⁴ Exod. 8.22; 9.4; 10.23; 11.7.

⁵ A disciple of Augustine who afterward became Bishop of Sicca.

⁶ *De libero arbitrio*; begun at Rome in 388 and finished between 391 and 395 in Africa. In Letter 31 Augustine mentions having sent a copy to St. Paulinus at Nola.

also by me, because I, at least, ought to see it afterward if I advance in learning, this should not be a matter of surprise or chagrin, but of excuse and congratulation, not because a mistake has been made, but because it has been censured. For, anyone who is willing for others to remain in error so as to conceal his own error is guilty of a most perverted form of self-love. How much better and more advantageous for him when he has made a mistake, if others whose warning frees him from error are themselves free from error. If he will not accept that, at least let him not have companions in his error! If God grants me what I wish, that I may collect and point out in some work drawn up for that purpose everything that, with the best of reasons, displeases me in all my books, then men will see that I am not a respecter of my own person.⁷

But if you who love me so much set me up before those by whose ill will or inexperience or understanding I am blamed, in such wise as to say that I have not gone wrong anywhere in my books, you are wasting your effort. You have not undertaken a good cause, and you are easily overcome in it by my own verdict, because I take no pleasure in being thought by my dearest friends to be such as I am not. Obviously, they do not love me, but another in my stead and under my name, if they love, not what I am, but what I am not. For, in so far as they know me or believe the truth about me, I am loved by them, but in so far as they attribute to me what they do not perceive in me, and what is not true, then it is not I but some unknown other who is loved by them. Consequently, if you at least know that it is my custom, when I say something demeaning about myself, not to say it insincerely, you know that I am not such a one as they praise. Tully, 'the greatest author in the Roman language,'⁸ said of someone that he never uttered a single word which he wished

⁷ Acts 10.34.

⁸ Lucan, *Pharsal.* 7.62,63.

to take back. This may indeed sound like perfect praise, but it is more likely to be true of a perfect fool than of a perfect sage. Those who are commonly called arrant fools, the more they depart from common sense and the more ridiculous and foolish they are, the less they are willing to take back any words which they have ever uttered, because it is certainly characteristic of the sagacious to regret a wrong, a foolish or an unseemly utterance. But, if we are to take this at its true worth, so as to believe that anyone was always to speak wisely and never to utter a word which he would be willing to take back, this must be believed with wholesome respect of the men of God, who have spoken under the impulse of the Holy Spirit rather than of him whom Cicero thus praised. I am so far from that perfection that, if I have uttered no word which I would be willing to take back, I am more like a fool than a sage. Truly, his writings are of the highest and most respected authority who has never uttered a word which he ought, rather than wished, to take back. Whoever has not yet attained this should have the second quality of modesty since he could not have the first of wisdom; since he could not speak so carefully as not to say anything regrettable, let him regret what he recognizes should not have been said.

Since, then, it is not true, as some of my dearest friends say, that I have said no words, or few, but rather many, perhaps, as even my critics think, which I would prefer to take back if I could, that quotation from Cicero, in which he said: 'He never uttered a word which he wished to take back,' is no compliment to me, but that sentiment of Horace causes me real pain: 'The word once released cannot return.'⁹ That is why I am keeping back my books, full of most searching questions on Genesis and the Trinity, longer than you wish or endure, so that, if it is impossible for them not to have some mistakes which can rightly be censured, at least they may

⁹ *Ep.* 2.3.390.

have fewer than they could have if they were published inconsiderately and with headlong haste. But you, as your letters show—for my holy brother and fellow bishop, Florentius,¹⁰ wrote me this—are pressing for their publication on the ground that I could defend my views during my life time, in case they were attacked either by stinging enemies or, perhaps, by unintelligent friends in certain quarters. But you say this, of course, because you do not think there is in them anything which could be called in question for any good reason; otherwise you would not be urging me to publish them, but to carry out a more careful revision. But I look rather to judges who are true and truthfully sincere, among whom I wish to include myself first of all, and my aim is that only those censurable passages may come to their notice which could escape my notice in spite of my careful scrutiny.

In view of that, let them take note of what is expressed in Book 3 of *Freedom of the Will*, when I was treating of rational substance, and where I said: 'In lower bodies, the soul so disposed after sin rules its body not entirely in accord with the will, but as the laws of nature allow.'¹¹ But let those who think that I settled or decided as certain anything about the human soul, as that it comes from the parents through their offspring, or that it sinned in the acts of an earlier and heavenly life and so deserved to be shut up in a corruptible flesh, let them observe that my words were so carefully weighed that—with the exception of this, which I hold as certain, that after the sin of the first man other men have been and are born in the flesh of sin, and that the likeness of sinful flesh came upon the Lord for the cure of the flesh—all those words are so chosen as not to prejudge any of the four opinions which I afterward set apart and analyzed, not asserting the truth of any of them, but meantime by a separate

10 Bishop of Hippo Diarrhytus, in the proconsular province of Africa.

11 *De lib. arb.* 3.11.34.

discussion, as I was carrying it on, deciding that, whichever of them should be true, God should unquestionably be praised.

For, whether all souls are generated from that first one, or whether they come into existence individually in each person, or whether they are created outside and introduced afterward, or whether they are plunged into bodies spontaneously, without doubt, that rational being, that is, the nature of the human soul in bodies of a lower order, namely earthly ones, being disposed after sin, which means the sin of the first man, rules its body in the meantime not entirely in accord with the will. I did not say 'after its sin,' or 'after it had sinned,' but I said, 'after sin,' so that if possible, whatever reason, after discussion, should pronounce, whether its sin or the sin of its parents in the flesh, what I said might be understood as correct. 'After sin, the soul disposed in bodies of a lower order rules its body not entirely in accord with the will' because 'the flesh lusteth against the spirit,'¹² and 'we do groan, being burdened,'¹³ and 'the corruptible body is a load upon the soul,'¹⁴—who can detail all the miseries of carnal weakness? But this will certainly not be so when 'this corruptible' shall 'put on incorruption,'¹⁵ so that 'this which is mortal may be swallowed up in life.'¹⁶ Then, indeed, the spiritual body will rule entirely in accord with the will; now, it does not do so entirely, but according as the laws of nature, to which it is subject, allow it; and so bodies are born and die, grow and grow old.¹⁷ But the soul of that first man, before sin, ruled his body in accord with the will, though it was not yet a spiritual but an animal body. But, after sin, that is, after sin had been committed in that flesh, and flesh was thereafter begotten in sin, the rational soul is so disposed in bodies of a

¹² Gal. 5.17.

¹³ 2 Cor. 5.4.

¹⁴ Wisd. 9.15.

¹⁵ Cf. 1 Cor. 53.54.

¹⁶ 2 Cor. 5.4.

¹⁷ Sallust, *Jug.* 2.3.

lower order that it does not rule its body entirely in accord with the will. But, if they do not yet agree about babies who have not yet committed any sins of their own, it is still true that the flesh is the flesh of sin, because, when they are baptized, the remedy required for its cure is 'the likeness of sinful flesh,'¹⁸ and so they have nothing in these words of ours to rouse their anger. It is quite evident, if I am not wrong, that the same flesh, even if its weakness derives from its nature and not from sin, only began to be begotten after sin, because Adam was not so created and he did not beget anyone before his sin.

Let them, then, seek out other points which they can criticize with good reason, not only in other works too hastily published, but even in this very work of mine on free will. I do not deny that they will find something, and they will do me a favor, since I certainly can be corrected as long as I live, even if those of my books which have gone out into so many hands cannot. The only ones who have a right to criticize these words, which I have so carefully phrased as not to give assent to any of those four opinions or arguments about the origin of the soul, are those who think that this same delay of mine in a matter so obscure should also be criticized. I do not defend my position against them, namely, that I am doing the right thing in taking my time over this question, because I have no doubt at all that the soul is immortal, not as God is, 'Who only hath immortality,'¹⁹ but in a certain way according to its own nature, and that it is a created being, not the substance of the Creator: this I hold most firmly, as well as all other truths about the nature of the soul. But, as it is the uncertainty of this very dark question about the origin of the soul which forces me to act thus, let them rather hold out a helping hand to me, as I admit my ignorance and my desire to know what the truth is, and let

18 Rom. 8.3.

19 1 Tim. 6.16.

them teach me, if they can, or show me what they have either learned by reliable reasoning or have come to believe on the authority of unmistakable divine revelation.

Note carefully what I say by way of example. Near the end of the Book called Ecclesiastes there is a passage about the dissolution of man, brought about by that death through which the soul is separated from the body, where the Scripture says: 'And let the dust return into its earth, as it was, and the spirit return to God who gave it.'²⁰ This authoritative statement is unquestionably true and leads no one into error, but, if anyone wished to interpret it so as to try to defend the view that there was a posterity of souls, and that all the subsequent ones come from that one which God gave to the first man, this passage seems to support him, because flesh is there spoken of as dust—obviously, dust and spirit mean nothing else in this passage than flesh and soul—and in that way it declares that the soul returns to God, as if it might be a sort of branch, cut from that soul which God gave to the first man, just as the flesh is returned to the earth, since it is an offshoot of that flesh which in the first man was fashioned of the earth. Thus, he might contend from this that we ought to believe something which is not known about the soul, but is perfectly well known about the body. There is no doubt about the propagation of the flesh, but there is about the soul. Both these ideas are expressed in this testimony: that each is returned to its source in a similar way, that is, 'let the flesh return to the earth as it was'—for it was taken from the earth when the first man was made—and 'the spirit return to God who gave it,' since 'He breathed into the face of the man whom he had fashioned, the breath of life and man became a living soul,'²¹ so that thereafter from each principle the offshoot of each should be derived.

²⁰ Eccle. 12.7. The Douay version has 'into the earth whence it came.'

²¹ Gen. 2.7.

However, if that view is the true one, that souls are not propagated from the first one, but are created elsewhere and given by God individually to each individual, it is also consistent with this statement: 'let the spirit return to God who gave it.' Thus, the two remaining opinions seem to be excluded, because, if each man's individual soul comes into being when he is created, it does not seem as if the passage ought to say: 'let the spirit return to God who gave it,' but: 'to God who made it,' for 'gave' sounds as if it were something outside which could be given. Besides, in the expression, 'return to God,' some do violence to the word and force it by saying: 'How can it return to a place where it never before was?' They claim that it ought to say: 'Let it go to God,' or 'proceed or travel to God,' rather than 'return to God,' if we are to believe that it never was there before. Likewise, it is not easy to explain how the soul is plunged spontaneously into the body when it is written: 'He gave it.' For this reason, as I said, these two expressions do violence to the words of this testimony: the one by which it is thought that each individual soul comes into existence in its own body, and the other that it is spontaneously plunged into the body. But, as to the other two, whether souls come as offshoots of that first one, or were created previously and stored up with God and given to each body separately, these words are adapted to them without effort.

Nevertheless, if the advocates of this opinion which holds that souls come into existence in their individual bodies should claim that the words, 'God gave it,' are used of the spirit, which is here put for soul—just as He is correctly said to have given us eyes or ears or hands or anything else, which members He certainly did not make outside the body and keep stored somewhere, so that, when need arose, He could give them, that is, add or join them on, but He made them in the body to which He is said to give them—I do not see how

they are to be answered unless some other evidence is produced, or some reasoning developed to refute it. Likewise, those who think that souls spread spontaneously into bodies take the words, 'God gave it,' in the sense in which it says: 'God gave them up to the desires of their heart.'²² Therefore, one word is left, the one which says: 'let it return to God'; that is, how 'return' is to be understood, of something which was not there before, if souls come into existence separately in their own bodies. Thus, that one of the four opinions is hampered by this word alone. Still, I do not think that this opinion is to be rashly rejected because of that one word, because it might be possible to show by another turn of speech commonly used in the holy Scripture that this also can be said in the sense that the created spirit returns to its author by whom it was created, but not as if it had originally been with Him.

I have written this so that, if anyone wishes to support and defend any of those four theories about the soul, he should either offer such passages from the Scriptures, vouched for by the authority of the Church, as cannot be subject to different interpretations, as for example, that God made man, or else he should prove it by an argument so strong that no contradiction could arise, or, if it did, would deserve to be rated as madness. Such an argument is made when someone says that none but a living being can recognize truth or fall into error. We do not need the authority of Scripture to see how true this is; common sense itself pronounces it true by transparent reason, and anyone who would contradict it would be known for a complete madman. If anyone can furnish this sort of argument in this very intricate question, let him help in my ignorance, but if he cannot let him not blame my delay.

Concerning the virginity of holy Mary, if what I wrote does not convince you that it could happen, then all the miraculous

²² Rom. 1.24.

happenings which occur in bodies are subject to denial. But, if the reason for not believing it is that it happened only once, ask your friend,²³ who is still exercised about this, whether there is no incident in profane literature which happened only once and yet is believed, not as a mythical tale, but as the claim of historic truth. Ask him, please. If he says no such incident can be found in literature, he needs correction; if he admits it, the question is answered.

144. Augustine, bishop, to the citizens of Cirta,¹ his deservedly cherished, dear and longed-for brothers of every rank (412)

It is God's work, not ours, that the cause of our deep grief in your city has been removed, the hardness of the human heart, resistant to the most evident, and, so to speak, most widely published truth, has been overcome by the power of the same truth; that the sweetness of peace is relished, and the love of unity no longer dazzles aching eyes, but enlightens and strengthens eyes made strong. I would not in any way attribute this to human effort, even if the conversion of so great a number of people had taken place while I was with you, speaking to you and exhorting you. This is His doing, His accomplishment, who warns us of external signs of things through his ministers, but uses circumstances themselves to teach us interiorly through His own activity. However, this is no reason for us to be slothful in going to see you, that a praiseworthy result in your case was not brought about by us, but by Him 'Who alone doth wonderful things.'² We ought to run much more eagerly to look upon divine works than upon

²³ Volusian; cf. Letter 137.

¹ As a result of the council of bishops held there, or at Zerta (cf. Letter 141), as well as of the imperial penal laws, the people returned to the Church.

² Ps. 71.18.

our own, because we, also, if there is any good in us, are His work, not man's, and that is why the Apostle says: 'neither he that planteth is anything, nor he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase.'³

I remember from their literature⁴ the incident you write of, that Xenocrates, by discoursing on the value of temperance, converted Polemon to a quite different life, when he not only was a drunkard, but even was drunk at the time. And although as you have sagely and truly understood, he was not won to God, but only freed from his enslavement to gluttony, I would not even attribute this improvement wrought in him to a human but to a divine agency. For, if there is any good, such as beauty and strength and health and the like, in the body itself—our lowest part—this can come only from God who made and perfected nature; how much less possible is it, then, for any other to endow the mind with good! Can human madness entertain any more arrogant or ungrateful thought than that beauty of body is God's gift to man, but purity of mind is man's? This is expressed thus in the book of Christian wisdom: 'As I knew,' it says, 'that I could not otherwise be continent, except God gave it, this also was a point of wisdom to know whose gift it was.'⁵ Therefore, if Polemon, when he turned from a dissolute life to one of self-restraint, had known whose gift this was, and had cast off his pagan superstitions to worship Him truly, he would have been eminent, not only for his continence, but also for his true wisdom and his saving reverence. And this would have brought him im-

3 1 Cor. 3.7.

4 I.e., pagan literature; cf. Horace *Sat.* 2.3.254; Cicero, *De fin.* 4.6. Xenocrates (400-316 B.C.) was a disciple of Plato, and succeeded him as head of the Academy. Polemon, a dissolute youth of Athens, was returning from a night of revelry when he passed the early morning class of Xenocrates. He rushed in to make sport of the philosophers, but was so touched by the discourse on temperance that he was immediately converted from his evil life and lived an austere life as a philosopher. He became head of the Academy after Xenocrates.

5 Wisd. 8.21.

mortality in the life to come, as well as honor in this life. How much less reason have I, then, to credit myself with your own conversion and that of your people, which you have just reported to me, and which was unquestionably brought about by heavenly intervention, without any urging from me, and, indeed, when I was not even there! Recognize the significance of this; think it over reverently and humbly. Give thanks to God, my brethren, to God; fear God that you may not fall away from Him; love Him that you may draw close to Him.

But, if human love acts secretly to keep some aloof, and human respect is a false bond of union among them, let such as these take note that the human conscience is an open book to God, and that they can neither falsify what He sees, nor escape his judgment. And if some are troubled by an anxiety about their salvation because of this same question of unity, let them force upon themselves this very reasonable course of action, as I see it, namely, to believe of the Catholic Church—that is, the one spread throughout the world—the testimony of the divine Scriptures rather than the slander of human tongues. But, regarding this dissension which has broken out among men—and, whatever kind of men they were, they do not impair the promises of God who said to Abraham: ‘In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed,’⁶ which was believed as a prophecy when it was heard, but is denied in its fulfillment now that it is seen—let men apply now this very short and, if I am not wrong, this very cogent argument: Either that case was tried in an ecclesiastical court overseas, or it was not so tried. If it was not so tried, the flock of Christ is guiltless throughout all the overseas nations, with which flock we rejoice to be in communion; and those others⁷ are obviously separated from the guiltless by a

⁶ Gen. 26.4.

⁷ The Donatists.

sacrilegious disruption. If, however, that case was so tried, who does not understand, who does not feel, who does not see that they are the defeated party in it, and that their communion is severed from the rest? Let them choose, then, whether they prefer to believe the published verdict of the ecclesiastical investigators or the mutterings of the defeated litigants. Note carefully, as your prudence inclines you to do, that against that concisely expressed but easily understood dilemma no serious answer can be made; yet Polemon was more readily turned away from his drunkenness than they from their inveterate error.⁸

Grant me your pardon, honorable sirs, deservedly cherished, dear and longed-for brothers, for this letter, which is perhaps more lengthy than agreeable, but is still, to my mind, more likely to do you good than to flatter you. May God grant the desire of both of us that I should go to you. I can find no words to express how the intensity of my love enkindles in me the longing to see you, but we doubt not that in your kindness you do believe this.

*145. Augustine gives greeting in the Lord to the lord, Anastasius,¹ his holy and dearly loved brother
(412 or 413)*

A safe opportunity has arisen of sending greetings to your Sincerity, through the reverend servants of God, our brothers, Lupicinus and Concordialis,² who could give your Charity news of what goes on here, even if I did not write. But I know how much you love us in Christ, because you also know how

⁸ The text indicates a lacuna here, but the meaning of the analogy is clear.

¹ He seems to have been a member, or perhaps the abbot of a monastery somewhere in Africa.

² Probably monks from St. Augustine's monastery.

much you, in turn, are loved by us in Him, so I do not doubt that you might feel sad if you saw them without a letter from me, especially as you could not fail to know that they had come from here, and were on such intimate terms with us. At the same time, I owe you letters, but I am not sure whether this is the first time I have answered since I received your letter. I have been so entangled and distracted with cares that I do not even know that.

I am most anxious to know how you are, and whether the Lord has granted you some rest—as far as that is possible on this earth—since, ‘if one member glory, all the members rejoice with it,’³ and thus it often happens to us that, by reflecting that some of our brothers enjoy even a brief rest, we are refreshed not a little in the midst of our anxieties, as if we also were sharing with them the quiet and peaceful life. Yet, when troubles multiply in this unstable life, they force us to long for eternal rest. Doubtless, the world is more dangerous when it flatters than when it afflicts us, and we must be more on our guard when it entices us to love it, than when it warns and forces us to despise it. For, while everything that is in it is ‘concupiscence of the flesh, and concupiscence of the eyes and the pride of life,’⁴ it is true that even among those who prefer spiritual, invisible, and eternal things to such, an attraction for earthly pleasures often creeps in and encompasses our duties with its allurements. The more things to come are desirable to our love, the more things present do violence to our weakness. May those who know how to see and lament these things deserve to overcome and escape them. The human will is utterly unable to accomplish this, without the grace of God, because it cannot be called free so long as it is subject to the assaults and enslavement of the passions, for ‘by whom a man is overcome, of the same also he is the slave,’⁵ and ‘If

3 1 Cor. 12.26.

4 1 John 2.16.

5 2 Peter 2.19.

the son shall make you free,' says the Son of God Himself, 'you shall be free indeed.'⁶

Therefore, the Law, by teaching and commanding what cannot be performed without grace, makes known to man his own weakness, that this weakness, once made known, may seek its Saviour, through whom the will made whole can do what in its weakness it cannot do. The Law, therefore, leads to faith; faith obtains the outpouring of the Spirit; the Spirit spreads charity abroad; charity fulfills the Law. For this reason, the Law is called a 'pedagogue,'⁷ under whose severe threats 'whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved; how then shall they call upon him in whom they have not believed?'⁸ Consequently, that the letter without the spirit may not die,⁹ the life-giving spirit is given to those who believe and who call upon Him, but 'the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given to us,'¹⁰ in order to accomplish what the same Apostle says: 'Love is the fulfillment of the law.'¹¹ Thus, 'the law is good for him who uses it lawfully,'¹² but he uses it lawfully who understands why it was given, and who takes refuge from its threats in the grace which sets him free. If anyone is ungrateful to this grace by which the wicked man is justified, as if he trusted in his own strength to fulfill the Law, who 'not knowing the justice of God and seeking to establish [his] own, has not submitted [himself] to the justice of God,'¹³ for him the Law becomes not an aid to forgiveness but a bond of sin; not

6 John 8.36.

7 Cf. Gal. 3.24. In antiquity, the pedagogue was not, as today, the schoolmaster, but the slave or attendant who accompanied the child to school.

8 Rom. 10.13,14; Joel 2.32.

9 2 Cor. 3.6.

10 Rom. 5.5.

11 Rom. 13.10.

12 1 Tim. 1.8.

13 Rom. 10.3.

that the Law is evil, but because sin, as it is written, brings death upon such persons through that which is good.¹⁴ For, he sins more grievously under the commandment who knows by the commandment the evil of what he does.

But it is useless for anyone to think that he has triumphed over sin when he refrains from sin through fear of punishment, because, even though the impulse of the evil passion has not been carried into action exteriorly, the evil passion is still the enemy within. And who could be held innocent before God who would willingly do what is forbidden, if you would remove what he fears? Therefore, he is guilty in will who would willingly do what it is unlawful to do, but who does not do it because he cannot escape punishment. For, so far as lies in him, he would prefer that there were no justice to forbid and punish sin, and, therefore, if he would prefer that there were no justice, who can doubt that he would do away with it if he could? How, then, can such an enemy of justice be just, who would do away with the obligations of justice, if the power were given him, so as not to have to endure the threats and penalties of justice? Therefore, he who refrains from sin through fear of punishment is an enemy of justice, but he will be a friend if he refrains from sin through love of justice; then he will truly fear sin. For, he who fears hell does not fear to sin, he fears to burn; but the one who hates sin itself as he hates hell, he is the one who fears to sin. That same 'fear of the Lord is holy, enduring forever and ever,'¹⁵ for that fear has the torment of punishment, and 'is not in charity, but perfect charity casteth [it] out.'¹⁶ Thus, anyone's hatred of sin is in proportion to his love of justice, and this is not the result of the Law causing fear by its letter, but by the spirit healing through grace. Then, what the Apostle urges is accomplished:

¹⁴ Rom. 7.13.

¹⁵ Ps. 18.10.

¹⁶ 1 John 4.18.

'I speak a human thing because of the infirmity of your flesh; for as you have yielded your members to serve uncleanness and iniquity unto iniquity, so now yield your members to serve justice unto sanctification.'¹⁷ What is the meaning of 'as that, so also this,' except that as you were not forced to sin by any fear, but by the desire and pleasure of sin itself, so you should not be driven to live a good life by the fear of punishment, but you should be persuaded to it by the attraction and love of justice? And this is not yet perfect justice—so it seems to me—but it is, so to speak, a full-grown justice. Not without reason would the Apostle have made this preliminary statement, 'I speak a human thing, because of the infirmity of your flesh,' if he had not had something else to say, if they could have stood it at that time. For, although corporal punishment does not withdraw us from the will to sin, it does withdraw us from the act, and no one would readily commit sin openly, so as to reveal its unlawful and impure pleasure, if he were sure that the torments of vengeance would follow at once. Justice, however, is to be so loved that not even bodily sufferings should keep us from performing her works, and that, even in the hands of cruel enemies, our works may shine before men to whom such works can be pleasing, so as 'to glorify our Father who is in heaven.'¹⁸

Here is the reason why that strong lover of justice cries out: 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or the sword? As it is written: For thy sake we are put to death all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter; but in all these things we overcome because of him that hath loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor

¹⁷ Rom. 6.19. The Douay version has 'justification' for 'sanctification.'

¹⁸ Matt. 5.16.

life, nor angels nor principalities, nor things present nor things to come, nor might nor height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.¹⁹ Note how he does not say in any way: 'Who shall separate us from Christ?' but, showing the bond of our union to Christ, he says: 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?' Therefore, our bond of union to Christ is love, not fear of punishment. Then, after enumerating the things which seem to have the violence but have not the power of separation, he makes his conclusion so as to name the same love of God which he had declared of Christ. And what is the meaning of 'from the love of Christ,' if not 'from the love of justice'? Of Him it is said: 'Who of God is made unto us wisdom and justice and sanctification and redemption: that as it is written: he that glorieth may glory in the Lord.'²⁰ Therefore, as that man is most wicked whom corporal punishment does not hold back from the impure acts of degrading pleasure, so he is most just who is not prevented by the fear of corporal pains from the deeds of shining charity.

That love of God, as we ought ever to keep before our mind, is 'poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given to us,'²¹ so that 'he that glorieth may glory in the Lord.'²² When, then, we feel ourselves poor and lacking in this love, we are not, out of our want, to demand His riches, but in our prayer we should ask, seek, and knock,²³ so that He with whom is the fountain of life may grant us to be inebriated with the plenty of his house, and to drink of the

¹⁹ Rom. 5.35-39; Ps. 43.22.

²⁰ 1 Cor. 1.30,31; Jerem. 9.24.

²¹ Rom. 5.5.

²² 1 Cor. 1.31.

²³ Luke 11.9.

torrent of his pleasure.²⁴ And we are flooded and quickened with this that we may not be overwhelmed with sadness, but may even 'glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience trial, and trial hope; but hope confoundeth not:' not that we are able to do this of ourselves, 'but because the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given to us.'²⁵

It has given me pleasure to say these things to you, at least by letter, since I could not speak to you face to face. This is not your fault, because you do not 'mind high things, but consent to the humble,'²⁶ but it is because of certain ones who attribute too much to the human will,²⁷ which they think is able of its own strength to fulfill the Law, once it has been given, without any help from the grace of holy inspiration about the teaching of the Law. Through their argument the weakness of men, wretched and needy as it is, is convinced that we ought not to pray lest we enter into temptation; not that they dare to say this openly, but, whether they like it or not, this conclusion certainly flows from their theory. For, what use is there in His saying: 'Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation,'²⁸ or what use, when, after this exhortation He was teaching us to pray, that He instructed us to say: 'Lead us not into temptation,'²⁹ if this is not to be fulfilled by the help of divine grace, but to rest entirely with the human will? What more is there to say?

Greet the brothers who are with you, and pray for us that we may be saved by that salvation of which it is said: 'They that are in health need not a physician, but they that are ill;

²⁴ Ps. 35.10.9.

²⁵ Rom. 5.3-5.

²⁶ Rom. 12.16.

²⁷ These were Pelagius and his followers.

²⁸ Matt. 26.4; Mark 14.38; Luke 22.46.

²⁹ Matt. 6.13; Luke 11.4.

for I am not come to call the just but sinners.³⁰ Pray, then, for us that we may be just. This is indeed something which man cannot do unless he knows and wishes it; and he will be so constantly, if he wishes it fully; but it will not be through his own effort that he is able, unless he is healed and helped by the grace of the Spirit.

146. Augustine gives greeting in the Lord to the beloved lord, his most-desired brother, Pelagius¹ (about 413)

I am most grateful to you for being so kind as to gladden me with a letter giving me news of your welfare. May the Lord reward you with good things, my beloved lord and much-desired brother; may you be always blessed in them, and may you live forever with the eternal God. Although I do not recognize myself in the eulogies of me which the letter of your Benignity contains, I cannot be ungrateful for your good will toward my insignificance, but I urge you, at the same time, rather to pray for me that I may become such, by the Lord's help, as you believe I now am.

May you remain safe and pleasing to the Lord. Remember us, beloved lord and much-desired brother.²

³⁰ Matt. 9.12,13; Mark 2.17; Luke 5.31,32.

¹ Author of the Pelagian heresy; cf. Letter 140. He was born in Britain, lived in Rome during the years 401-409, left at the time of Alaric's invasion, and went to Africa. Augustine met him at Carthage. His views were condemned by the Council of Carthage in 412, after he had left for Palestine, from which place he wrote the letter to which this one is the answer. Its conciliatory tone shows that Augustine had hopes of reclaiming him; but when he used it as part of his defense at the Synod of Diospolis, in 415, Augustine had to explain himself. This he did in *De gestis Pelagii* 50-53.

² This is written in another hand.

147. *Augustine to the noble lady, Paulina,¹ greeting (413)*

THE BOOK ON THE VISION OF GOD

Chapter 1

Conscious of the debt which I have incurred through your request and my promise, devout servant of God, Paulina, I ought not to have been so slow in discharging it. For, when you asked me to write you something lengthy and detailed about the invisible God, and whether He can be seen by bodily eyes, I could not refuse lest I affront your holy zeal, but I put off the fulfillment of my promise, either because of other tasks or because I needed somewhat more time to think over what you asked me. But, since it is such a deep subject that it becomes more difficult the more one thinks of it—not so much in what is to be thought and said of it, but in the method of persuasion to be used with those who hold contrary opinions—I decided it was high time to put an end to my delay, in the hope that writing rather than postponing it would bring me divine help. Therefore, I think in the first place that the manner of life has more effect in this kind of research than the manner of speech. Those who have learned from our Lord, Jesus Christ, to be meek and humble of heart² make more progress by meditation and prayer than by reading and listening. I do not mean that speech will cease to play its part, but when he who plants and he who waters have done the duty of their task, he leaves the rest to Him who gives the increase,³ since He made the one who plants and the one who waters.

¹ Of this lady, who is called 'religious servant of God,' which seems to make her a nun, and '*clarissima*,' which points to her being an aristocrat, nothing much is known. Fr. Pope (*Saint Augustine of Hippo*) refers to her as St. Paulina, but does not give his source.

² Matt. 11.29.

³ 1 Cor. 3.7.

Chapter 2

According to the inward man, then, receive the words of understanding, for that is renewed day by day, even when 'the outward man is corrupted,'¹ either by the chastisement of abstinence, or by a spell of ill health, or by some mishap, or at least by the very onset of age—a necessary consequence even for those who enjoy good health for a long time. Therefore, lift up the spirit of your mind, 'which is renewed unto knowledge, according to the image of him that created him,'² where Christ dwells in you by faith,³ where there is no Jew or Greek, bond, free, male or female,⁴ where you will not die when you begin to be freed of your body, because there you did not waste away although weighed down by years. Intent on this interior life of yours, take note and see what I say. I do not want you to depend on my authority, so as to think that you must believe something because it is said by me; you should rest your belief either on the canonical Scriptures, if you do not yet see how true something is, or on the truth made manifest to you interiorly, so that you may see clearly.

Chapter 3

By way of example I shall say something to prepare you beforehand for greater certitude, and I will draw it preferably from that source from which the task of constructing the argument in this subject has been derived. We believe that God is seen in the present life, but do we believe that we see Him with our bodily eyes, as we see the sun, or with the gaze of the mind, as everyone sees himself inwardly, when he sees

¹ 2 Cor. 4.16.

² Col. 3.10.

³ Eph. 3.17.

⁴ Gal. 3.28; 1 Cor. 12.13; Col. 3.11.

himself living, wishing, seeking, knowing or not knowing? You yourself, when you have read this letter, recall that you have seen the sun with your bodily eyes; you can also see it at once, if it is the right time, if you are in a place where the sky is in your range of vision, from the direction needed to look upon the sun. But to look upon those things which I said are beheld by the mind, namely, that you are living, that you wish to see God, that you seek this, that you know that you are living and wishing and seeking, but you do not know in what manner God is seen; to see all these things, I repeat, you do not use your bodily eyes, nor do you perceive or look for any part of space through which your gaze may travel in order to attain to the sight of these things. This is how you see your life, will, power of search, knowledge, ignorance—for it is no despicable part of this kind of sight to see that you do not know—this, I repeat, is how you see all these things: you see them in yourself, you possess them within yourself, and, the more simply and inwardly you behold them, the more clearly and surely you see them, without any outline of figures or brightness of colors. Since, therefore, we do not see God in this life either with bodily eyes, as we see heavenly or earthly bodies, or with the gaze of the mind, as we see some of those things which I have mentioned, and which you most certainly behold within yourself, why do we believe that He is seen, except that we rest our faith upon the Scripture, where we read: ‘Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God,’¹ and upon any other writings to this effect with the same divine authority? Of this we believe that it is forbidden to doubt, and we do not doubt that it is an act of piety to believe.

¹ Matt. 5.8.

Chapter 4

Keep this distinction in mind, then, so that, if I suggest to you in the course of my argument that you see something with the eyes of the flesh, or perceive it with any other of its senses, or recall that you have so perceived it, as colors, noises, odors, tastes, warmth are perceived—or if we experience anything else in the body by seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting or touching—or that you see it with the gaze of the mind, as you see your life, will, thought, memory, understanding, knowledge, faith or anything else which you perceive mentally, and you do not doubt that it is so, not only by believing, but by manifestly beholding it; you may conclude that I have demonstrated my point. But what I shall not so demonstrate, so that it be held as seen and perceived either by bodily or mental senses, and if I shall nevertheless say something which must of necessity be either true or false, but which seems to belong to neither of these categories, it remains only that it be believed or not believed. But, if it is supported by the evident authority of the divine Scriptures, namely, of those which in the Church are called canonical, it must be believed without any reservation. In regard to other witnesses or evidence which are offered as guarantees of belief, you may believe or not, according as you estimate that they either have or have not the weight necessary to produce belief.

Chapter 5

If we believed none at all of those things which we have not seen, that is, have not experienced as being actually present either mentally or corporally, or have not learned

from holy Scripture, either by reading or hearing of them, how could we know of the origin of cities where we never have been, such as that Rome was founded by Romulus, or, to take more recent events, that Constantinople was founded by Constantine? Finally, how could we know what parents begot us, or from what fathers, grandfathers, ancestors we have sprung? Since we obviously know many things of this sort, which nevertheless we have not learned either as present to any of our faculties, as the sun and the mental faculty of the will, or on the authority of the canonical writings, as that Adam was the first man, or that Christ was born in the flesh, suffered and rose again, we know these things on the word of others, and we have concluded that their testimony, at least in this field of information, is completely trustworthy. If we are sometimes led astray in such matters, either by believing that something is so when it is not so, or that it is not so when it is, we conclude that there is no danger so long as the matter is not contrary to that faith on which our devotion is founded. This preface of mine raises a question not yet formulated, but it forewarns you and others who will read these words of the sort of judgment you should make, either of my writings or of anyone else's, lest you think that you know what you do not know, or rashly believe what you have neither perceived by the senses of your body or the gaze of your mind upon the evidence of the subject to be known, nor learned on the authority of the canonical Scriptures, as something worthy of belief even though not present to the bodily or mental faculties.

Chapter 6

Shall we now come to the subject? or is there further need of instruction before you read? There are some who think that

the very act which we call belief is the only act of the mind when it looks upon something. If that is the case, there is something wrong with that preface of ours, in which I made the distinction that it is one thing to perceive an object through the body, as the sun in the sky, or a mountain, a tree, or some physical object on the earth; another, to perceive by the gaze of the mind a fact no less evident, as we are inwardly conscious of our own will when we will something, or our thought when we think, or our memory when we remember, or any other such experience in the mind without the intervention of the body; and, finally, that it is something else again to believe what is not present to the bodily or mental faculties, nor recalled as having been so present, as that Adam was created without parents, and that Christ was born of a virgin, suffered, and rose again. These events were accomplished in the flesh and certainly could have been seen in the flesh, if we had been there, but now they are not present to us, as that light is present which is seen by our eyes, or as we are now mentally conscious of the will by which we now will something. Since this distinction is not false, doubtless my forewarning did not contain a distinction phrased with too little regard for clearness, as between believing and being mentally conscious of something.

Chapter 7

What shall we say, then? Is it enough to say that there is this difference between seeing and believing, that we see what is present and believe what is absent? Perhaps it really is enough, if by the word present in this connection we understand what is an object of our bodily or mental faculties. Thus, I see this light by a bodily sense, thus, I am fully aware of my will, because these are presented to my mental faculties,

and are present within me. However, if anyone whose face and voice are present to me should show me his will, that will which he shows me would not be an object of my bodily or mental faculties; hence, I do not see, I believe, or, if I think he is lying, I do not believe, even if it should happen to be as he says. Therefore, the things which are not present to our faculties are believed if the authority on which they are offered seems trustworthy; things which are before us are seen, hence they are said to be present to our mental or bodily faculties. Although there are five senses in the body—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching—of these, sight is attributed especially to the eyes, but we use this word also of the others. Not only do we say ‘See, how bright it is,’ but also ‘See, what a noise,’ ‘See, what a smell,’ ‘See, what a taste,’ ‘See, how hot it is.’ The fact that I said things not present to the senses are believed is not to be understood as meaning that we classify among them what we saw at some previous time, and now remember and have a certainty of having seen; for those are classified not among the objects of our belief, but as things we have seen and therefore known, not because we rest our belief on other evidence, but because we remember and know without any doubt that we have seen them.

Chapter 8

Our knowledge, therefore, consists of things seen and things believed. Of the things which we have seen or now see, we are our own witnesses, but in those which we believe, we are led to our assent by the testimony of others, because, of the things which we do not recall having seen, or do not now see, we receive indications, either by spoken or written words, or by certain documents, and, when these have been seen, the unseen things are believed. Not without reason do we say that

we know not only what we have seen or see, but also what we believe, when we yield assent to some fact under the influence of suitable evidence or witnesses. Moreover, if it is not inappropriate to say that we also know what we firmly believe, this arises from the fact that we are correctly said to see mentally what we believe, even though it is not present to our senses. It is true that knowledge is attributed to the mind, whether the object of its perception and recognition has come to it through the bodily senses or through the mind itself, and faith itself is certainly seen by the mind, although what is believed by faith is not seen. For this reason the Apostle Peter says: 'In whom also now, though you see him not, you believe,'¹ and the Lord Himself said: 'Blessed are they that have not seen and have believed.'²

Chapter 9

When, then, a man is told: 'Believe that Christ rose from the dead,' if he believes, notice what he sees, notice what he believes, and distinguish between them. He sees the man whose voice he hears, and that same voice is included among the objects of the bodily senses, according to what we said above. The witness and the testimony are two different things, of which one is referred to the eyes, the other to the ears. But perhaps the importance of this witness is augmented by the authority of other testimonies, namely, of the divine Scriptures, or of any others by whom he is induced to believe. The Scriptures are then included among the objects of the bodily senses: of the eyes if he reads them, or of the ears if he hears them read. He sees them in his mind and he understands whatever is signified by the shapes or sounds of the letters; he sees his

1 1 Peter 1.8.

2 John 20.29.

own faith by which he answers instantly that he believes; he sees the thought by which he thinks what benefit can accrue to him by believing; he sees the will by which he draws near to embrace religion; he even sees a certain image of the resurrection itself, as produced in his mind, and without this it is impossible to understand anything which is described as having happened corporeally, whether it is believed or not. But, I think you do distinguish between the way in which he sees his own faith by which he believes and the way he sees that image of the resurrection produced in his mind: something which even the unbeliever sees if he hears these words.

Chapter 10

Therefore, he sees all these things partly through the body and partly through the mind. But he does not see the will of the one from whom he hears the order to believe, nor the actual Resurrection of Christ, but he does believe; yet he is said to see it by a sort of mental gaze, according to his faith in the testimonies rather than in things believed to be present. For, the things which he sees are present to the senses either of mind or body, although the will of the one from whom he hears the order to believe has not become something past, but remains in the speaker. The same one who speaks sees this will in himself; the one who hears does not see it, he believes it. But the Resurrection of Christ is past, and the men who lived at that time did not see it; those who saw the living Christ had seen Him dying, but they did not see the actual Resurrection; they believed it most firmly by seeing and touching the living Christ whom they had known as dead. We believe wholly that He rose again, that He was then seen and touched by men, that He now lives in heaven, and that 'he dieth now no more, death shall no more have dominion over

him.¹ But the actual fact is not present to our bodily senses, as this sky and earth are present, nor to the gaze of our mind, as the very faith by which we believe is present.

Chapter 11

But I think you have understood, through this preface of mine, what it is to see either mentally or corporeally, and what difference there is between that and believing. This indeed happens in the mind and is seen by the mind, since our faith is visible to our mind. However, what is believed by that faith is not visible to our bodily senses, just as the same body in which Christ rose is not visible; and it is not visible to another's mind, as your faith is not perceived by my mind, although I believe it is in you, but I do not see it corporeally—and neither can you—nor mentally, as you can; as I see mine, but you cannot. 'For no man knoweth what is done in man but the spirit of a man that is in him,'¹ 'until the Lord come who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the thoughts of hearts,'² so that each one will see not only his own but those of others. In this sense the Apostle said that 'no man knoweth what is done in man, but the spirit of man that is in him', according to what we see in ourselves; for according to what we believe but do not see, we know that there are many faithful, and we are known to many.

Chapter 12

If these distinctions are now clear, let us come to the main

1 Rom. 6.9.

1 Cf. 1 Cor. 2.11.

2 1 Cor. 4.5.

point. We know that God can be seen, because it is written: 'Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.'¹ Perhaps I should not have said 'We know,' but 'We believe,' since we have not at any time seen God either corporeally, as we see this light, or mentally, as we see the very faith in us by which we believe; but I do so only because it is written in that part of Scripture. As we are believers in it, have we the least doubt of its being true? Still, when the Apostle John said something similar, his words were: 'We know that when he shall appear, we shall be like to him, because we shall see him as he is.'² See! he said he knew something that had not happened, and which he knew by believing, but not by seeing. Therefore we were right in saying: 'We know that God can be seen,' although we have not seen Him, but we have put our faith in the divine authority which is contained in the holy books.

Chapter 13

But, what is the meaning of that saying of the same authority: 'No man hath seen God at any time'?¹ Would the answer be that those words refer to seeing God, not to having seen Him? For it says 'They shall see God,' not 'they have seen; and 'we shall see him as he is,' not 'we have seen.' Therefore, the words, 'no man hath seen God at any time,' do not contradict those former statements. The clean of heart, who wish to see God, shall see Him whom they have not seen. But what about this: 'I have seen God face to face, and my soul hath been saved'?² Is it not contrary to that other passage: 'No man hath seen God at any time,' and this,

¹ Matt. 5.8.

² 1 John 3.2.

¹ John 1.18; 1 John 4.12.

² Gen. 32.30.

written of Moses, that he spoke to God, 'face to face, as a man is wont to speak to his friend,'³ and this: 'I saw the Lord of hosts sitting upon a throne,'⁴ and other such testimonies which are usually drawn from the same authority—how can it be that they are not contrary to the words, 'No man hath seen God at any time'? Yet, the very Gospel can be considered self-contradictory. For, how can it be true to say, as it says: 'he that seeth me, seeth the Father also,'⁵ if no man hath seen God at any time? Or how is it true that 'Their angels always see the face of my Father,' if no one hath seen God at any time?

Chapter 14

By what rule of interpretation shall we prove that these seemingly contrary and contradictory statements are neither contrary nor contradictory? For it cannot be remotely possible that the authority of the Scriptures should be fallacious at any point. If we say of the passage, 'no one hath seen God at any time,' we understand it of men alone; as it says in that other place: 'no one knoweth what is done in man, but the spirit of a man that is in him,'¹—no one obviously of men, for this cannot be applied to God, since it is written of Christ that 'he needed not that any should give testimony of man, for he knew what was in man.'² The Apostle, explaining this more fully, says: 'Whom no one of men hath seen, nor can see'; therefore, if he says 'no one hath seen God at any time,' it is as if he said 'no one of men,' and thus this difficulty will seem to be solved, at least to this extent, that it is not contrary to what

³ Exod. 33.11.

⁴ Isa. 6.1.

⁵ John 14.9.

¹ 1 Cor. 2.11.

² John 2.25.

the Lord says: 'Their angels always see the face of my Father,' since we surely believe that the angels see God, 'whom no one hath seen at any time,' but no one of men. How, then, was God seen by Abraham,³ Isaac,⁴ Jacob,⁵ Job,⁶ Moses,⁷ Micheas,⁸ Isaias,⁹ of whom the absolutely truthful Scripture bears witness that they saw God, if no one of men 'hath ever seen God, nor can see him'?

Chapter 15

Some even want to prove that the wicked will see God, and they think that God has been seen by the Devil also, taking in that sense what is written in the Book of Job, that the Devil came with the angels into the presence of God,¹ so that they even call in question how this is said: 'Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God,'² and this: 'follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see God.'³ I greatly wonder whether those who think that the wicked will see God, and that God has been seen by the Devil, go so far as to claim that they are also clean of heart and that they follow peace and holiness with all men.

³ Gen. 18.1.

⁴ Gen. 26.2.

⁵ Gen. 32.30.

⁶ Job 38.1; 42.9.

⁷ Exod. 33.11.

⁸ 3 Kings 22.19.

⁹ Isa. 6.1.

¹ Job 1.6; 2.1.

² Matt. 5.8.

³ Heb. 12.14.

Chapter 16

The statement which the Lord makes, 'He that seeth me, seeth the Father also,'¹ can, on somewhat more careful examination, be shown not to be contrary to the words, 'no man hath seen God at any time.' He did not say: 'Because you have seen me, you have seen the Father also,' but by saying: 'he that seeth me, seeth the Father also,' he wished to show the unity of substance between the Father and the Son, that they might not be thought to differ from each other in any way. Thus, since it is true to say: 'He that seeth me, seeth the Father also,' and since it is clear that no one of men hath seen God at any time, no one can be imagined to have seen either the Father or the Son, in so far as the Son is God, and is one God with the Father; but, in so far as He is man, certainly 'afterwards he was seen upon earth, and conversed with men.'²

Chapter 17

But what is a serious difficulty is how there is no contradiction in the statements about so many men of old seeing God, if 'no one hath seen God at any time,' whom 'no man hath seen, nor can see.' You see what a hard question you have suggested to me, on which you want me to write at length and exhaustively, in the limits of a short letter, and which it seemed to you should be explained carefully and fully. Are you willing to give your attention meantime to the answers I have found in the works of other excellent commentators on the divine Scriptures, regarding what they think about seeing God, which may perhaps satisfy your desire, although it may be that you are acquainted with them? Give your

¹ John 14.19.

² Bar. 3.38; John 1.14.

attention, then, to these few points, if you will. When blessed Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, in his commentary on the Gospel, had come to the place¹ where the angel appeared in the temple to the priest Zachary,² here are the great and noble things he said on this occasion about the vision of God.

Chapter 18

‘Not without reason,’ he says, ‘is the angel seen in the temple, because the coming of the true priest was then being proclaimed, and the heavenly sacrifice was being prepared, in which angels were to minister. And well is he said to have appeared to one who beheld him suddenly. The divine Scripture is accustomed to use this particular term, either of the angels or of God, so that what cannot be seen in advance is said to appear. Thus you have, “God appeared to Abraham at the oak of Mambre,”¹ for he who is not perceived beforehand, but is suddenly presented to sight, is said to appear. But the objects of the senses are not seen in that way, and He on whose will it depends to be seen, and whose nature it is not to be seen, is seen because of His will. For, if He does not wish it, He is not seen, but if He wishes, He is seen. Thus, God appeared to Abraham because He willed it; to others He did not appear, because He did not will it. When Stephen was being stoned by the people, he saw the heavens opened and Jesus standing at the right hand of God,² but this was not seen by the people. Isaias saw the Lord of hosts,³ but no one else could see Him, because He appeared to whom He

¹ *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* 1,24-27 (CSEL 32; 4.25).

² Luke 1.11.

¹ Gen. 18.1. The Douay version reads: ‘in the vale.’

² Acts 7.55.

³ Isa. 6.1.

pleased. And why do we speak of men when of the heavenly powers and virtues themselves we read that "no one hath seen God at any time"? To this the Apostle added: "the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."⁴ Therefore, if no one has seen God the Father at any time, we must either necessarily assent to the Son having been seen in the Old Testament, and the heretics must cease to give a beginning to Him who was seen before He was born of the Virgin, or certainly it is not possible to refute the argument that the Father or the Son, or at least the Holy Spirit—if, however, the Holy Spirit can be seen—are seen under the appearance which their will has chosen, but their nature has not originated, since we learn that the Spirit also was seen under the form of a dove.⁵ Therefore, "no one hath seen God at any time," because no one has beheld that fullness of the divinity which dwells in God;⁶ no one has experienced it with mind or eyes, for the word "seen" is to be referred to both. Finally, when he adds, "the only-begotten Son himself, he hath declared him," it is the sight of minds rather than of eyes which is described. For beauty is seen, but virtue is declared; the former is grasped by the eyes, the latter by the mind. But, why should I speak of the Trinity? A seraphim appeared, when he willed it, and Isaias alone heard his voice;⁷ an angel appeared and is now present, but is not seen. It is not in our power to see, but in His to appear. However, even if we have no power of seeing, there is a grace of meriting that we may be able to see. Therefore, he who had the grace merited the occasion. We do not merit the occasion, because we have not the grace of seeing God. Is it any wonder that the Lord is not seen in the present world except when He wills? Even in the resurrection

⁴ John 1.18.

⁵ Matt. 3.16.

⁶ Col. 2.9.

⁷ Isa. 6.6,7.

itself it is not easy to see God, except for the clean of heart; hence: "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God."⁸ How many kinds of blessed He had enumerated, yet to none of them had He promised the ability to see God! If, then, those who are clean of heart will see God, doubtless others will not see Him; the unworthy will not see Him, nor will he who does not wish to see God be able to see Him. God is not seen in any locality, but in the clean heart; He is not sought by bodily eyes, nor limited by our sight, nor held by touch, nor heard by His utterance, nor perceived in His approach. When He is thought absent, He is seen; when He is present, He is not seen. Finally, not all the Apostles saw Christ. Therefore He says: "So long a time have I been with you, and you have not known me?"⁹ But he who knew "what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and the charity of Christ which surpasseth all knowledge,"¹⁰ saw both Christ and the Father.¹¹ For we do not now know Christ according to the flesh,¹² but according to the spirit. For "our breath, Christ the Lord, is taken from before our face,"¹³ and may He deign in His mercy to fill us unto all the fullness of God,¹⁴ that He may be able to be seen by us.'

Chapter 19

If you understand these words, what else do you seek from me, since that question, which seemed so difficult, is now solved? But a distinction had been made between the sense of 'No one hath seen God at any time' and the manner in which those saints of old saw God, if those words were said

8 Matt. 5.8.

9 John 14.9.

10 Eph. 3.18,19.

11 John 14.9.

12 2 Cor. 5.16.

13 Cf. Lam. 4.20.

14 Eph. 3.19.

because God is invisible: they saw—those of them who did see God—because to whomever He wished, and as He wished, He appeared in that form which His will chose, even as His nature remained hidden. For if, when the patriarchs saw God, His very nature appeared to them—although if He had not willed, doubtless it would not have appeared—how is it that no one has seen God at any time, when, at His will, His very nature was beheld by so many of the patriarchs, so that these words might be understood as spoken of God the Father, that no one has seen Him at any time? Ambrose certainly did not pass over his chance to refute certain heretics from this ground, namely the Photinians,¹ who assert that the Son of God took His beginning from the womb of the Virgin, and who refuse to believe that He had existed previously. But, because he saw others, that is, the Arians, promoting more dangerous views, whose error was undoubtedly included with that other, if the Father is invisible by nature, but the Son is believed to be visible, he asserted that both have one equally invisible nature, adding also the Holy Spirit. He conveyed this idea briefly but admirably when he subsequently said: ‘or certainly it is not possible to refute the argument that the Father or the Son, or at least the Holy Spirit, if, however, the Holy Spirit can be seen, are seen under the appearance which their will has chosen but which their nature has not formed.’² He could have said ‘their nature has not manifested,’ but he chose to say ‘formed,’ lest the aspect under which God chose to appear should be thought to have the form of His nature, and thereby an argument be made to prove that His substance is changeable and mutable. May the merciful and good God Himself keep this error far from the faith of His devout children!

¹ Followers of Photinus of Sirmium in Pannonia, head of one of the numerous Arian sects claiming that the Son was not consubstantial with the Father.

² Cf. above, Ch. 18.

Chapter 20

Therefore, God is invisible by nature, and not only the Father, but also the Trinity itself, one God, and, because He is not only invisible but also unchangeable, He appears to whom He wills, and under the aspect that He wills, so that His invisible and unchangeable nature may remain wholly within Himself. But the longing of truly devout souls, by which they desire to see God and burn with eager love for Him, is not enkindled, I think, by desire to see that aspect under which He appears as He wills, but which is not Himself; they long for the substance by which He is what He is. The saintly Moses, His faithful servant, showed the flame of this desire of his when he said to God, with whom he spoke face to face as to a friend: 'If I have found favor before thee, show me thyself.'¹ What, then? Was it not Himself? If it were not Himself, he would not have said 'Show me thyself,' but 'Show me God'; yet, if he really beheld His nature and substance, he would have been far from saying 'show me thyself.' It was Himself, therefore, under that aspect in which He willed to appear, but He did not appear in His own nature which Moses longed to see, inasmuch as that is promised to the saints in another life. Hence, the answer made to Moses is true that no one can see the face of God and live,² that is, no one living in this life can see Him as He is. Many have seen, but they saw what His will chose, not what His nature formed, and this is what John said, if he is rightly understood: 'Dearly beloved, we are the sons of God, and it hath not yet appeared what we shall be. We know that when he shall appear, we shall be like to him, because we shall see him as he is';³ not as men saw Him when He willed under the ap-

1 Exod. 33.11-13 (Septuagint).

2 Exod. 33.20.

3 1 John 3.2.

pearance that He willed; not in His nature under which He lies hidden within Himself even when He is seen, but as He is. This is what was asked of Him by the one who spoke to Him face to face, when he said to Him: 'Show me thyself,' but no one can at any time experience the fullness of God through the eyes of the body any more than by the mind itself.

Chapter 21

It is one thing to see; it is something else to grasp the whole of something by seeing, since, indeed, a thing is seen when it is perceived as present in any way whatsoever, but the whole is grasped by seeing, when it is seen, so that no part of it escapes the notice, or when its outlines can be included in the view, as nothing of your will at present escapes your notice, or you can take in the span of your ring at a glance. I have instanced these two examples, the one referring to the glance of the mind, the other to the bodily eyes, for sight, as he¹ says, is to be referred to both, that is, to the eyes and the mind.

Chapter 22

Moreover, if the reason why no one hath seen God at any time is, as the disputant¹ whose words we are examining says, because 'no one has beheld the fulness of His divinity, no one has experienced it with mind or eyes, for the word "has seen" is to be referred to both,' it remains for us to find out how the angels see God, because of that passage which I quoted from the Gospel: 'Their angels always see the face of

¹ Ambrose; cf. above, Ch. 18.

¹ *Ibid.*

my Father.² If He appears to them not as He is, but under whatever aspect He wills, while His nature remains hidden, we have more and more need to inquire how we shall see Him as He is, as Moses desired to see Him when he asked God, who was then visible to him, to show him Himself. It is promised to us, as our supreme reward, at the resurrection, that we shall be like the angels of God,³ and, if they do not see Him as He is, how shall we see Him, when we have become like to them at the resurrection? But, see what our Ambrose then says. 'Finally,' he says, 'when this is added, "the only-begotten Son himself, he hath declared him," it is the sight of minds rather than of eyes which is described. For beauty is seen, but virtue is declared; the former is grasped by the eyes, the latter by the mind.'⁴ He had said shortly before that sight is to be referred to both; now he attributes it not to the mind, but to the eyes; yet I do not think he does it out of careless disregard of his own words, but because it is more usual for us in speaking to attribute sight to the eyes, as beauty to the body. Our habit of speaking applies this more frequently to things which are limited by space and distinguished by colors. But, if there were no beauty to be perceived by the mind, He would not be described as 'beautiful in form above the sons of men.'⁵ For this was not merely said according to the flesh, but also according to spiritual beauty. Therefore, beauty is used also as applying to the gaze of the mind, but, because it is more common to use it for corporeal objects or comparisons made with them, for that reason he said: 'Beauty is seen, but virtue is declared; the former is grasped by the eyes, the latter by the mind.' Thus, when the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, declares Him with an indescribable utterance, the rational being, pure and holy, is filled

² Matt. 18.10.

³ Luke 20.36; Matt. 22.30; Mark 12.25.

⁴ Cf. above, Ch. 18.

⁵ Ps. 44.3.

with the indescribable vision of God, which we shall attain when we have become like the angels; because it is true that no one has seen God at any time, in the sense in which visible things of the body, as known by the senses, are seen; since, if He has been seen at any time in that way, He is not seen according to His own nature, but is seen by appearing under that aspect which He wills, although that nature remains hidden and unchangeable within Him. In that way in which He is seen as He is, He is seen now, perhaps, by some of the angels; He will be seen thus by us when we have become like them.

Chapter 23

Subsequently, when he had added that the heavenly powers, such as the seraphim, are not seen either except when they will and as they will, he did so to point out the depth of invisibility of the Trinity. 'However,' he says, 'even if we have no power of seeing, there is a grace of meriting that we may be able to see. Therefore, he that had the grace merited the occasion. We do not merit the occasion, because we have not the grace of seeing God.'¹ Obviously, by these words in which he is not teaching his own doctrine, but explaining the Gospel, he does not intend us to understand that some of them will see God, but some will not see Him; 'to them that believe he gave the power to be made the sons of God,'² since the following words apply to all: 'We shall see him as he is';³ but by saying: 'we do not merit the occasion because we have not the grace of seeing God,' he shows that he is speaking of this world. Although God has deigned to appear here under the aspect which He willed, as to Abraham,⁴ to Isaias,⁵ and

¹ Cf. above, Ch. 18.

² John 1.12.

³ 1 John 3.2.

⁴ Gen. 18.1.

⁵ Isa. 6.1.

others like him, to unnumbered others, although they belong to His people and His eternal inheritance, He shows Himself under no such appearance. But in the world to come, those who are to receive the kingdom which has been prepared for them from the beginning,⁶ all the clean of heart, shall see Him, and in that kingdom there will be no others.

Chapter 24

Notice, therefore, what he goes on to say about that world, beginning with: 'Is it any wonder that the Lord is not seen in the present world except when He wills? Even in the resurrection itself it is not easy to see God, except for the clean of heart; hence: "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God." If, then, those who are clean of heart will see God, doubtless others will not see Him; the unworthy will not see Him, nor will he who does not wish to see God be able to see Him.' You observe how guardedly he speaks at present of those who will see God in the world to come: It will not be everyone; only those who are worthy. For the worthy and the unworthy will rise again in that kingdom where God will be seen, since, 'all that are in the graves shall hear his voice . . . and come forth,' but with a great difference, 'for they that have done good things shall come forth unto the resurrection of life; but they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment.'¹ This judgment means eternal punishment, according to this other saying: 'He that doth not believe, is already judged.'²

⁶ Matt. 25.34.

¹ Cf. John 5.28,29.

² John 3.18.

Chapter 25

When St. Ambrose said 'nor will he who does not wish to see God, be able to see Him,' what else does he wish us to infer but that he who is unwilling to devote to the cleansing of his heart an effort worthy of so great an aim does not wish to see God? Notice, then, that he adds: 'God is not seen in any locality, but in the clean heart.' Nothing could be more clearly, more forcefully, expressed. Therefore, without any shadow of doubt, the Devil and his angels, and all the wicked with them, are shut out from this vision, since they are not clean of heart. Consequently, from what is written in the Book of Job,¹ about the angels coming into the presence of God and the Devil coming with them, we are not to believe that the Devil saw God. It said that they came into God's presence, not God into their presence. The things which we see come into our presence, but not those by which we are seen. They came, therefore, as it reads in many versions of Scripture, 'to stand before the Lord,' not that God was before them. There is no need of dwelling on this point, to try to show in the measure of our ability how this also happens in time, since all things are always in the sight of God.

Chapter 26

We ask, now, how God is seen, not under that aspect by which He willed to appear to certain ones in that age, when He spoke not only to Abraham and other just men, but even to the murderer Cain,¹ but how He is seen in that kingdom where His sons will see Him as He is. Then, indeed, 'He will

¹ Job 1.6; 2.1.

¹ Gen. 18.1; 4.

satisfy their desire with good things,² that desire with which Moses burned, which left him unsatisfied with speaking to God face to face,³ and made him say: 'Show me thyself openly, that I may see thee,'⁴ as if he were saying what is expressed about that desire in the psalm: 'I shall be satisfied when thy glory shall appear.'⁵ With that desire, also, Philip burned and longed to be satisfied, when he said: 'Show us the Father and it is enough for us.'⁶ Speaking of that vision, Ambrose, lover of God and man of desires, said: 'God is not seen in any locality,' as at the oak of Mambré, or on Mount Sinai, 'but in the clean heart,' and he continues, knowing what he longs and pines and hopes for: 'God is not sought by bodily eyes, through which He showed Himself to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others in this world, nor is He limited by our sight because of this saying, "Thou shalt see my back parts";'⁷ nor held by touch, as when He wrestled with Jacob;⁸ nor heard by His utterance, as He was heard not only by so many saints but even by the Devil;⁹ nor perceived in His approach, as formerly when He walked in Paradise at the afternoon air.'¹⁰

Chapter 27

You see how the holy man tries to draw our minds away from all carnal senses, so as to render them fit to see God. Yet, what does such a one achieve externally, when he plants

2 Ps. 102.5.

3 Exod. 33.11.

4 Exod. 33.13 (Septuagint).

5 Ps. 16.15.

6 John 14.8.

7 Exod. 33.23.

8 Gen. 32.24-30.

9 Gen. 3.14.

10 Gen. 3.8.

and waters, if God, 'who giveth the increase,'¹ does not work within? Without the help of the Spirit of God, who would be able to think that there is something, that it is greater than all the things which are experienced through the body, and that it is not seen in any locality, is not an object of search by the eyes, is not heard by its utterance, nor held by touch, nor perceived in its approach, yet is seen by the clean heart? When he said this, he was not speaking of this life, since he used the clearest kind of distinction, in differentiating the life of the world to come from that of the present world, in which God does not appear as He is, but under that aspect which He wills, and to whom He wills. He said: 'Is it any wonder that the Lord is not seen in this present world, except when He wills? In the resurrection itself it is not easy to see God, except for those who are clean of heart; hence: "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God."' From here on he begins to speak of that world where all who rise again will not see God, but only those who rise to eternal life. The unworthy will not see Him, for of them it is said: 'Let the wicked be taken away lest he behold the brightness of the Lord';² but the worthy will see Him, and of such the Lord spoke when, though present, He was not seen, saying: 'He that loveth me keepeth my commandments, and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself to him.'³ Those to whom it will be said: 'Depart . . . into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels,'⁴ shall not see Him; but those who will hear the words: 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess ye the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the

1 1 Cor. 3.7.

2 Isa. 26.10 (Septuagint).

3 John 14.21,23.

4 Matt. 25.41.

world,⁵ shall see Him. The former, indeed, 'shall go into everlasting burning, but the just into life everlasting.'⁶ And what is life everlasting but that life which He describes elsewhere: 'Now this is eternal life, that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou sent,'⁷ the life in which He promises to those who love Him to show Himself as one God with His Father, not as He was seen by both good and bad in this world in the flesh?

Chapter 28

At the future judgment, when He will so come as He was seen going into heaven,¹ that is, in the same form of Son of man, they will see that form and to them He will say: 'I was hungry and you gave me not to eat,'² because 'the Jews also shall look upon [Him] whom they have pierced,'³ but shall not see that form of God in which 'He thought it not robbery to be equal with God.'⁴ Those who will see Him as He is will then see Him in that form of God; but they will not see Him so because they were poor in spirit in this life or because they were meek, because they mourned, or hungered and thirsted after justice, or were merciful or peace-makers, but because they are clean of heart. There is this to stress among those beatitudes that, though those who have a clean heart may do everything else, the conclusion is not given, 'they shall see God,' except to the words, 'Blessed are the clean of heart.'⁵

5 Matt. 25.34.

6 Matt. 25.46.

7 John 17.3.

1 Acts 1.11.

2 Matt. 25.42.

3 Zach. 12.10.

4 Phil. 2.6.

5 Matt. 5.3-10.

Thus, He will be seen by the clean of heart, who is not seen in any locality, is not sought by bodily eyes, nor limited by our sight, nor held by touch, nor heard by His utterance, nor perceived in His approach. For 'no man hath seen God at any time,' either in this life as He is, or even in the life of the angels, as those visible things which are perceived by bodily sight, because 'the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.'⁶ Therefore what He declares is said to belong to the sight of the mind, not to that of bodily eyes.

Chapter 29

But, again, lest our desire should be transferred from one bodily sense to another, that is, from the eyes to the ears, when he had said: 'God is not sought by bodily eyes, nor limited by our sight, nor held by touch,' he also added: 'nor heard by His utterance,' so that, if we can, we are to understand that the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father declares Him inasmuch as He is the Word; not a sound echoing in our ears, but an image giving knowledge to our minds, that it may shine there with an inner, indescribable light. This is what was said to Philip in the words, 'He that seeth me, seeth the Father also,'¹ when he saw and did not see. Then Ambrose, whose longing for that vision was so exceptional, continues and says: 'When He is thought absent, He is seen, and when He is present, He is not seen.' He did not say 'When He is absent,' but 'when He is thought absent,' for He who fills heaven and earth² without being confined by limited space or spread through vast space is nowhere absent; He is everywhere wholly present, but contained in no

⁶ John 1.18.

¹ John 14.9.

² Jer. 23.24.

place. Whoever is transported beyond the bounds of his mind³ to understand this sees God even when He is thought absent; whoever cannot do this should ask and strive to deserve to be able to do it. But let him not knock at the door of man, the arguer, to ask that he may read what he does not read, but at the door of God the Saviour, that he may be strengthened to do what he is now not strong enough to do. He subsequently makes clear to us why he said: 'And when He is present, He is not seen,' by adding: 'Finally, not all the Apostles saw Christ. Therefore He says: "So long a time have I been with you, and you have not known me?"' This is how God was present but was not seen.

Chapter 30

Why did he not venture to say 'Finally, the Apostles did not see Christ,' instead of 'not all the Apostles,' as if some of them then saw by actual vision how He and the Father are one?¹ Or did he, perhaps, refer to that time when Peter said: 'Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God,' and received the answer: 'Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona, because flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but my Father who is in heaven'?² And yet it does not seem clear to me whether that revelation was produced in his mind through his faith in believing so great a truth, or by a vision of something seen, since Peter was to show himself still so puny of faith as to fear the loss by death of the Son of the living God³ whom so short a time before he had confessed.

³ 2 Cor. 5.13.

¹ John 10.30.

² Matt. 16.16,17.

³ Matt. 16.21,22.

Chapter 31

Another point that can trouble us is how it was possible for the very substance of God to be seen by some while still in this life, in view of what was said to Moses: 'No man can see my face and live,'¹ unless it is possible for the human mind to be divinely rapt from this life to the angelic life, before it is freed from the flesh by our common death. He who heard 'secret words which it is not granted to man to utter'² was so rapt that a certain turning away of his consciousness from the senses of this life took place, and he said he did not know 'Whether it was in the body or out of the body,' that is, as usually happens in advanced ecstasy, when the mind is removed from this life into that life without loosing the tie of the body, or whether there is an entire separation, such as occurs in actual death. Thus it happens that this saying, 'No man can see my face and live,' is true, because the mind must necessarily be withdrawn from this life when it is caught up to the ineffable reality of that vision, and it is also not beyond belief that the perfection of that revelation was granted to certain saints, who were not yet near enough to death that their bodies were ready for burial. This, I think, was in the mind of the writer when he would not say 'the Apostles did not see Christ,' but said 'not all the Apostles saw Christ,' believing that the vision of the Godhead itself, of which he was speaking, could have been granted to some of them even then; in particular, blessed Paul, who, although he was, so to speak, the last of the Apostles, did not fail to speak of his own ineffable revelation.

1 Exod. 33.20.

2 2 Cor. 12.2-4.

Chapter 32

Again, in ancient times, in the case of the faithful servant of God, Moses, who was destined to labor on this earth and to rule the chosen people, it would not be surprising that what he asked was granted: that he might see the glory of the Lord, to whom he said: 'If have found favor before thee, show me thyself openly.'¹ He received an answer adapted to present conditions, that he could not see the face of God, because no man could see Him and live; thus God made clear that the vision belongs to another and better life. In addition to that, the mystery of the future Church of Christ was foreshadowed by the words of God. Doubtless, Moses represented in himself the type of the Jewish people who would believe in Christ after His Passion, and that is why it says: 'When I shall pass, thou shalt see my back parts,'² and the rest which is there said, by an admirable mystery which foretells the Church to come. But it would take too long to discuss this now. However, as I had started to say, it is shown later in the Book of Numbers that even what he asked was granted to his desire, for there the Lord rebuked the sister of Moses for her obstinacy, and He said that He appeared to the other Prophets in a vision and in a dream; but to Moses plainly and not by riddles, and He added the words: 'And he saw the glory of the Lord.'³ Why, then, did God make such an exception of him, if not, perhaps, that He considered him such a ruler of His people, so faithful a minister of His whole house, that he was worthy, even then, of that contemplation, so that, as he had desired, he saw God as He is; a contemplation promised to all His sons at the end of life?⁴

¹ Exod. 33.13.

² Exod. 33.21-23.

³ Num. 12.6-8 (Septuagint).

⁴ 1 John 3.2.

Chapter 33

I believe that holy man whose words we are examining was thinking of such things when he said: 'not all the Apostles saw Christ,' since some of them probably saw Him according to what I have said. But, to prove that not all of them saw Him, as he said, he at once adds: 'Therefore He said: "So long a time have I been with you and you have not known me?"' Then, explaining by what sort of men God is seen as He is in that contemplation, he says: 'He who knew "what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and the charity of Christ which surpasseth all knowledge," saw both Christ and the Father.'¹

Chapter 34

I generally understand these words of the Apostle Paul thus: by the 'breadth,' all the good works of charity; by the 'length,' perseverance to the end; by the 'height,' hope of heavenly rewards; by the 'depth,' the unsearchable judgments of God,¹ from whom that grace has come to men. This interpretation I also adapt to the mystery of the Cross:² for the breadth I take the transverse beam on which the hands are stretched, because it signifies works; for the length, that part of the upright which extends from the transverse beam down into the earth, where the whole crucified Body was seen erect, which signifies to persevere, that is, to be steadfast and long-suffering; by the height, that part which extends upward from the transverse beam, where the Head is conspicuously seen, because of the expectation of heavenly things.

¹ Cf. above, Ch. 18.

¹ Letter 140.62.

² Letter 140.64.

This is to prevent us from believing that good works ought to be done and persevered in for the sake of the earthly and temporal favors of God, rather than for that heavenly and eternal good which 'faith that worketh by charity'³ hopes for. By the depth I understand that part of the cross which is plunged into the hidden part of the earth and is not seen, but from which rises the whole part above, which is visible, just as man is called from the secret will of God to a share in such great grace, 'one after this manner, and another after that';⁴ but that charity of Christ which surpasseth all knowledge is undoubtedly found where 'that peace is, which surpasseth all understanding.'⁵ But, whether that defender of the Gospel sees this in these words of the Apostle, or whether he perhaps understands something more appropriate, you, at any rate, see, if I am not mistaken, that it is not inconsistent with the rule of faith.

Chapter 35

Hence, we now take it in the sense of spiritual insight when he said: 'He who knew "what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and the charity of Christ which surpasseth all knowledge," saw both Christ and the Father'; and, lest it should seem to some dull-witted person that he was speaking of corporeal sight, he said: 'For we do not now know Christ according to the flesh, but according to the spirit. For "our breath, Christ the Lord is taken before our face." ' When he here says 'we know,' he speaks of our present knowledge by faith, not of our future knowledge by contemplation, because, whatever we know by 'unfeigned faith,'¹ even

³ Gal. 5.6.

⁴ 1 Cor. 7.7.

⁵ Phil. 4.7.

¹ 1 Tim. 1.5.

though we do not yet behold it by sight, we now hold by unshaken belief. Finally, after he had said that he does not 'now know Christ according to the flesh,' as the Apostle says, and had added the testimony of the Prophet: 'our breath, Christ the Lord is taken before our face,' he at once continued: 'may He deign in His mercy to fill us unto all the fullness of God, that He may be able to be seen by us.'² Certainly it is clear that in saying 'we know' he derived that knowledge from faith, by which the just man now lives,³ and not from contemplation, by which we shall see God as He is.⁴ This gift he wishes for himself and, consequently, for us, and he indicates that it will be ours by saying: 'May He deign, in His mercy, to fill us unto all the fullness of God, that He may be able to be seen by us.'

Chapter 36

Some of the Apostles in their speech showed their understanding of this fullness of God, in the sense of thinking that we shall become entirely what God is. These words, as you recall, the Apostle expressed in this way when he said: 'To know also the charity of Christ which surpasseth all knowledge, that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God.'¹ Therefore, they say, if we have anything less than God has, and are less than He is in any respect, how shall we be filled unto all the fullness of God? But, when we are filled, surely we shall be equal to Him. You are revolted and you turn with loathing from that error of the human mind, I am sure, and you are right. Later, if God wills and in proportion

² Cf. above, Ch. 18.

³ Hab. 2.4; Rom. 1.17; Gal. 3.11; Heb. 10.38.

⁴ 1 John 3.2.

¹ Eph. 3.19.

to the strength He gives, we shall discuss the way in which that fullness is to be understood, according to which it is said that we are to be filled unto all the fullness of God.

Chapter 37

Now, note carefully and recall what has been said, so as to see whether I have explained what you submitted to me, and what seemed difficult to explain. If you ask whether God can be seen, I answer: He can. If you ask how I know, I answer that we read in Scripture, the source of truth: 'Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God,'¹ and other passages of like tenor. If you ask how He is said to be invisible if He can be seen, I answer that He is invisible by nature, but He is seen when He wills and as He wills. He has been seen by many, not as He is, but under such aspect as it pleased Him to appear. If you ask how even the wicked Cain saw Him,² when he was questioned by Him about his crime, and judged; or how even the Devil himself saw Him when he came with angels to stand before Him,³ if it is true that the clean of heart are blessed because they shall see God, I answer that it does not necessarily follow that those who sometimes hear words uttered by Him also see Him. Those who heard Him when He said to His Son: 'I have both glorified it and will glorify it again'⁴ did not see Him, but it is not surprising that even some who are not clean of heart see God under the appearance which His will makes possible, while His invisible nature, remaining unchanged within itself, is still hidden. If you ask whether He can also be seen at any time as He is, I answer that this

¹ Matt. 5.8.

² Gen. 4.6-15.

³ Job 1.6; 2.1.

⁴ John 12.28.

was promised to His sons, of whom it is said: 'We know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.'⁵ If you ask by what means we shall see Him, I answer: as the angels see, for we shall then be equal to them;⁶ as the angels see those things which are called visible; but no man hath ever seen God nor can see Him, because 'He inhabiteth light inaccessible,'⁷ and His nature is invisible as it is immortal. This the Apostle asserts in a similar passage when he says: 'Now to the king of ages, invisible and immortal,'⁸ because, as He is now immortal and will never afterward be mortal, so He is not only now but always invisible. 'For he is not seen in any locality, but in the clean heart; He is not sought by bodily eyes, nor limited by our sight, nor held by touch, not heard by His utterance, nor perceived in His approach. But the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father'⁹ without sound of words declares the nature and substance of the Godhead, and therefore to eyes that are worthy and fit for such appearance He shows it invisibly. Those are the eyes of which the Apostle says: 'the eyes of your heart enlightened,'¹⁰ and of which it is said: 'Enlighten my eyes that I never sleep in death.'¹¹ For the Lord is a spirit;¹² therefore, 'he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.'¹³ Consequently, he who can see God invisibly can be joined to God incorporeally.

5 1 John 3.2.

6 Matt. 18.10; Luke 20.36.

7 1 Tim. 6.16.

8 1 Tim. 1.17.

9 John 1.18.

10 Eph. 1.18.

11 Ps. 12.4.

12 2 Cor. 3.17; John 4.24.

13 1 Cor. 6.17.

Chapter 38

I think there is nothing further to ask in the question which you have proposed to me. But examine in this whole discussion of ours what you have seen, what you have believed, what you still do not know, either because I have not spoken of it, or you have not understood, or you have not judged it credible. Among the points which you have seen to be true, distinguish further how you saw them: whether it was by recalling that you had seen them through the body, such as heavenly or earthly bodies, or whether you never perceived them by corporeal sight, but, by looking upon them with your mind only, observed that they are true and certain, such as your own will, about which I believe you when you speak, for it is true I cannot see it myself as it is seen by you. And when you have distinguished between these two, notice, too, how you make your distinction. Although we see some things with the body, others with the mind, the distinction between these two sorts of sight is seen by the mind, not the body. The objects which are beheld by the mind have need of no senses of the body to let us know that they are true, but those perceived through the body cannot be included in our knowledge if there is no mind to which these incoming messages can be referred. And it is a fact that those incoming messages, which it is said, in some wise, to receive, are left outside, but it forms images of them, that is, incorporeal likenesses of physical things, which it commits incorporeally to the memory, so that from there, when it has the will or power, it may give judgment on them, after bringing them out of custody and displaying them in the sight of its thought. And when it has its full powers, it also makes a distinction between these two: what it left outside in its corporeal aspect, what it beholds within as a likeness, and it discerns that the former is not there, but the

latter is. In the same way you think of my corporeal face, while I am absent; the image is present to you, but the face whose image it is is absent; the one is body, the other the incorporeal likeness of body.

Chapter 39

Note this, therefore, after you have carefully and faithfully examined and distinguished what you see; in making your distinction assess the actual weight of evidence on what you believe in this whole speech which I have been making to you, since I began to speak to you in this letter, and in it note to what extent you lend your faith to what you do not see. You do not put the same faith in me as you do in Ambrose, from whose books I have drawn this weighty testimony; or if you do think that we are both to be weighed in the same balance, of course you will not compare us in any way with the Gospel, or put our writings on the same footing with the canonical Scriptures. Obviously, if you are wise enough to distinguish correctly, you see that we fall far short of that authority, and that I fall even farther; however much credibility you assign to both of us, you compare us in vain to that high standard. Therefore, that saying: 'No man has seen God at any time,'¹ and: 'He inhabits light inaccessible, whom no man hath seen nor can see,'² and: 'Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God,'³ and other passages from the sacred books which I have cited—all these you believe more firmly than what Ambrose said: 'God is not seen in any locality, He is not sought by bodily eyes, nor limited by our sight, nor held by touch, nor heard

1 1 John 4.12.

2 1 Tim. 6.16.

3 Matt. 5.8.

by His utterance, nor perceived in His approach.' Doubtless, he understood or believed that God, who is seen by the clean of heart, is such as that, and I confess that this is also my opinion.

Chapter 40

Therefore, you yield faith to these words in one way, but to the divine words in quite a different way. Perhaps some little doubt has crept into your mind about us; that we may be somewhat less than clear about some of the divine words, and that they are interpreted by us, not as they were said, but as we imagine them. Perhaps you are saying to yourself: What if God is seen by the clean of heart, and is also visible in some locality? Or: What if the clean of heart will see God even with bodily eyes, when this corruptible shall put on incorruption,¹ when we shall be like the angels of God?² Perhaps you do not know how far you ought or ought not to believe us, and you are on guard not to be led astray by believing us either more or less than you ought. About the divine Scriptures, however, even when they are not clearly understood, you have no doubt that they are to be believed. But you surely observe and see this weighing of belief or non-belief, and the difficulty of knowing, and the storms of doubt, and the devout faith which is owed to the divine utterances; all these you see in your mind as they are, and you do not doubt in the least that they are in your mind in this way, either as I said them, or, preferably, as you knew them yourself. Therefore, you see your faith, you see your doubt, you see your desire and will to learn, and when you are led by divine authority to believe what you do not see,

¹ 1 Cor. 15.33.

² Luke 20.36.

you see at once that you believe these things; you analyze and distinguish all this.

Chapter 41

Of course, you will not make any sort of comparison between your bodily eyes and these eyes of your heart, with which you perceive that all this is true and certain, with which you observe and distinguish what is invisibly present to you; especially when, from these same visible things which are, in a sense, reflected by the sight of the bodily eyes, and from these same bodily eyes and their faculty of sight, of whatever kind and degree it may be, you estimate what a difference there is between them and the invisible things. I do not mean the higher ones in which you must believe even though they are not seen, but those, as I have said, which are mentally perceived as present—not the ones which require belief because of their absence—and which are seen with the interior eyes, not with those same eyes of flesh. Since, then, the interior eyes are judges of the exterior ones, and the latter are subject to the former, so to speak, in their duty and ministry of bringing in information; and since the former see many things which the latter do not see, while the latter see nothing which is not submitted to the judgment of the former, acting as president of the tribunal, would anybody fail to prefer the former to the latter as being incomparably superior?

Chapter 42

In view of all this, I ask you whether you think you are acting in darkness or in light when this great operation is

taking place in you by which you distinguish interior things from exterior and, without noise of words, prefer the former to the latter; when you leave the exterior ones outside and dwell within, among the interior ones, estimating them by computing their incorporeal limits? My opinion is that such great, such high, such true, manifest, and certain things cannot be seen without light. Look upon that light, therefore, in which you behold all other things, and see whether any glance of bodily eyes can draw near to it. Obviously, it cannot. Notice, also, and answer whether you see in it any dimensions or limits of space. You will find no such thing there, I think, if you are careful to exclude from your inner vision whatever corporeal images the senses of the outer man bring in. But perhaps it is difficult, because, after the fashion of our carnal life, a host of fantasies in the likeness of material objects rushes in on those interior eyes, also; and when I made at least an attempt to resist them, I cried out in anguish in that short letter of mine,¹ relying on divine authority, and I said: 'Let flesh, drunk with carnal thoughts, hear this: God is a spirit.'² By that reproach I was restraining my own mind from that sort of vanity rather than anyone else's. We are indeed more readily drawn to what is customary, and our soul, in its weakness, likes to bring in or allow worldly intercourse to enter, not in order to rouse itself to health, but out of indulgence, and to give itself some sort of rest in its weariness.

Chapter 43

Therefore, if you are unable to clear the eye of your mind entirely of this seeming cloud of corporeal images, examine

¹ Letter 92.5. This letter, addressed to Italica, dealt with this same subject, but in less detail.

² John 4.24.

them carefully within yourself. Look at heaven and earth in your thought, as you have been wont to look at them with your bodily eyes, and notice that these images of heaven and earth, which are set out before the eyes of your thought, are the likenesses of objects, not the objects themselves. Give judgment, then, against yourself, in your own favor, if you are unable to drive from the eye of your mind these manifold fanciful images of corporeal qualities, and win the victory from your own defeat. For, no one, to my way of thinking, is so carried away by such imaginings as to believe that he holds in his memory or in his mental vision the sun, moon, stars, rivers, seas, mountains, hills, cities, in a word, the walls of his house or even of his sleeping-room, and whatever else he has knowledge of or experiences through his bodily eyes, as they are in their dimensions or limitations of space, whether they are still or in movement. Moreover, if those images in our mind, which resemble bodies or spaces, yet are not confined by spatial relations or limits and are not stored in our memory with spaces between them, how much less likely that those things which bear no resemblance to physical objects: 'charity, joy, peace, longanimity, benignity, goodness, faith, mildness, continency,'¹ should take up room, be separated by intervening spaces, or that the eyes of the heart should seek out any such spaces so as to send out their rays and thus see these things! Are not all these things together without effort, and are they not known by their own limits, without any surrounding space? Tell me, in what place you see charity, which nevertheless is known to you only inasmuch as you can perceive it with your mental gaze. You do not know it as great because you survey it as if you were looking at a gigantic mass; when it speaks within you, bidding you live by it, it does not shout with any sound of voice; you do not lift up the sight of your bodily eyes in order to see it; you do not strain the

¹ Gal. 5.22,23. These virtues are in a different order in the Vulgate.

strength of your bodily sinews in order to lay hold of it firmly; and when it comes into your mind you do not perceive its approach.

Chapter 44

This, then, is charity, however small a thing it appears to us, as it inheres in our will; 'it is not seen in any locality, nor sought by bodily eyes, nor limited by our sight, nor held by touch, nor heard by its utterance, nor perceived in its approach.'¹ How much more true this is of God, of whom charity is the pledge within us! If our interior man is an image of Him—insignificant, indeed—not begotten of Him but created by Him, and, although it is still renewed day by day,² it now dwells in such light that no faculty of corporeal sight comes near to it, and if those things which we perceive with the eyes of the heart by means of that light are distinguished from each other and separated by no intervals of space, how much more is this true of God, who inhabits light inaccessible³ to the bodily senses, to whom there can be no approach save for the clean of heart! Since, then, we have chosen that light in preference to any corporeal light, not only by the judgment of our reason, but also by the longing of our love, we shall make better progress in that love the stronger we become in it, until all the infirmities of our soul shall be healed by Him⁴ who becomes merciful toward our iniquities. Having become spiritual men in this more living life, we shall be able to judge all things, but ourselves be judged by no man;⁵ 'But the sensual man perceiveth not these things that are of the Spirit

¹ Cf. above, Ch. 18.

² 2 Cor. 4.16.

³ 1 Tim. 6.16.

⁴ Ps. 102.3.

⁵ 1 Cor. 2.15.

of God, for it is foolishness to him, and he cannot understand, because it is spiritually examined.⁶

Chapter 45

But, if we cannot yet prefer the light which judges to the light which is judged, or prefer the life of the mind to the life of sense-experience only, or prefer the nature which is not different in different places, but which has everything which it possesses in unity—such as our intellect is—to that nature which is made up of parts, so that the half is less than the whole—such as our bodies are—then it is useless for us to discuss such great and high topics. But, if we can now do this, let us believe that God is something greater than our intellect, so that His peace, ‘which surpasseth all understanding, may keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.’¹ For, that peace which surpasses all understanding is certainly not inferior to our mind, so that it should be considered visible to our bodily eyes, although the mind itself is invisible. Or is it true that the peace of God is different from the ‘brightness of his glory,’² although that is the same as the only-begotten Son, and that charity which surpasses knowledge is His, too, with which knowledge ‘we shall be filled unto all the fulness of God,’³ and that it is inferior to the light of our mind, which is bestowed by His enlightening act? But, if this light is inaccessible to fleshly eyes, how incomparably superior is that light! Consequently, since something of us is visible, like the body, and something invisible, like the interior man, and since the best part of us, that is, the mind and intelligence, is

6 1 Cor. 2.14.

1 Phil. 4.7.

2 Heb. 1.3.

3 Eph. 3.19.

invisible to the eyes of the body, how shall that which is better than the best part of us be visible to our lower part?

Chapter 46

I think you now agree, after considering all these arguments, that it is correct to say that 'God is not seen in any locality, but in the clean heart; He is not sought by bodily eyes, nor limited by our sight, nor held by touch, nor heard by His utterance, nor perceived in His approach.' If there is anything of this which we do not understand, or about which we are 'otherwise minded, this also God will reveal to us if, whereunto we are come, we continue in the same.'¹ For we have come to believe that God is not body, but spirit;² we have come also to believe that 'no man hath seen God at any time';³ and that 'God is light and in him there is no darkness';⁴ and that 'with him there is no change nor shadow of alteration';⁵ and that 'He inhabiteth light inaccessible, whom no man hath seen nor can see';⁶ and that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are one God,⁷ without any diversity or separateness of nature, and the clean of heart will see Him;⁸ and that 'we shall be like to him, because we shall see him as he is';⁹ and that 'God is charity and he that abideth in charity, abideth in God and God in him';¹⁰ and that we ought to 'follow peace and holiness, without which no

1 Phil. 3.15,16.

2 John 4.24.

3 John 1.18.

4 1 John 1.5.

5 James 1.17.

6 1 Tim. 6.16.

7 1 John 5.7,8.

8 Matt. 5.8.

9 1 John 3.2.

10 1 John 4.16.

man shall see God';¹¹ and that this corruptible and mortal body of ours shall be changed at the resurrection, and shall put on incorruption and immortality;¹² and that 'it is sown a natural body, it shall rise a spiritual body,'¹³ when the Lord will 'reform the body of our lowliness' and make it 'like to the body of his glory';¹⁴ and that God 'made man to his image and likeness';¹⁵ and that we are renewed in the spirit of our mind unto the knowledge of God 'according to the image of him that created us.'¹⁶ Those who walk by faith¹⁷ according to these and other similar authoritative pronouncements of the holy Scriptures, who have made spiritual progress by an understanding divinely given or strengthened, and who have been able to assess the value of spiritual things, have seen that the mental sight is superior to the bodily sight, and that the objects of this mental vision are not limited by space; they are not separated from each other by intervening spaces and their parts are not less than the whole.

Chapter 47

This is why he made the statement so confidently that 'God is not seen in any locality, but in the clean heart, that He is not sought by bodily eyes, nor limited by our sight, nor held by our touch nor heard by His utterance nor perceived in His approach.' Hence, as His invisible substance is praised in the holy Scriptures, yet it is revealed in the same authorities that He has been seen by many in the body, and in corporeal places; or else in the spirit, through which corporeal images

11 Heb. 12.14.

12 1 Cor. 15.53.

13 1 Cor. 15.44.

14 Phil. 3.21.

15 Gen. 1.26,27.

16 Col. 3.10.

17 2 Cor. 5.7.

are perceived, in some likeness however incorporeal, of the body, as happens in sleep or in ecstasy, that saintly man¹ differentiated this sort of visions from the nature of God, and said that they represented the forms which His will chose, not that which His nature presented. For God causes those visions in which He appears, as He wills, to whom He wills and when He wills, while His substance remains hidden and unchangeable in itself. If our will, remaining in itself, and without any change in itself, expresses words through which it manifests itself, after a fashion, how much more easily can the omnipotent God, maintaining His nature hidden and unchangeable, appear under any form He wills and to whom He wills, since He made all things out of nothing,² and remaining in Himself, 'reneweth all things.'³

Chapter 48

But, in order to attain that vision by which we see God as He is, He has warned us that our hearts must be cleansed. As then objects are called visible in our fashion of speaking, so God is called invisible¹ lest He be thought to be a material body, yet He will not deprive pure hearts of the contemplation of His substance, since this great and sublime reward is promised, on the Lord's own word, to those who worship and love God. At the time when He appeared visibly to bodily eyes, He promised that His invisible being also would be seen by the clean of heart: 'He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself

¹ St. Ambrose.

² 2 Macc. 7.28.

³ Wisd. 7.27.

¹ Col. 1.15; Tim. 1.17.

to him.² It is certain that this nature of His, which He shares with the Father, is equally invisible as it is equally incorruptible,³ which, as was said above, the Apostle at once set forth as the divine substance, commending it to men with what words he could. But, if bodily eyes behold it, in virtue of the changed nature of bodies at the resurrection, let those who can assert this look to it; for my part, I am more impressed by the statement of him who attributes this to clean hearts, not to bodily eyes, even at the resurrection.

Chapter 49

I do not refuse to learn something further, or to investigate the problem of the spiritual body which is promised to those who will rise again, if, in our discussion of the matter, we may succeed in avoiding the faults which are commonly stirred to life by human aims and controversies, provided that, 'above that which is written, that one be not puffed up for another, against the other,'¹ lest, while we seek to discover by argument how God can be seen, we lose that very peace and holiness, 'without which no man shall see God.'² May He keep this far from our hearts; may He make and keep them clean so that they may contemplate Him! However, as I do not doubt, so also I do not seek into the truth that the nature of God is never seen in any place. But now, as to whether anything can be seen by our bodily eyes without being seen in a place, I am ready to listen with peace and charity to those who are able to make it clear by proof, and to share with them my own conviction. There are some who take for granted that

² John 14.21.

³ 1 Tim. 1.17.

¹ Cf. 1 Cor. 4.6.

² Heb. 12.14.

God Himself is wholly corporeal, and they suppose that whatever is not corporeal is not substance at all. I think that these are to be avoided altogether. But there are others who agree fully that God Himself is not corporeal, and they think that those who will rise again to eternal life therefore will see God even in the body, since they hope that the spiritual body will be such that even what was flesh before will become spirit. I think it will be easy to judge how much this opinion differs from the former, and how much more tenable it is, even if it is not true: first, because it makes a great difference whether something contrary to truth is believed about the Creator or about a creature; secondly, because the effort of the mind when it aims to change matter into spirit may be tolerable, but not when it changes God into matter; finally, because what I said in my other letter,³ regarding the eyes of our flesh, that they can neither see God now, nor will they be able to later, is true even so; for it was said solely of bodily eyes, which they will not be then if the body itself becomes a spirit, because when He is seen it will be a spirit, not a body that will see Him.

Chapter 50

Therefore, the whole question that now remains is about the spiritual body: how far this corruptible and mortal one will put on incorruption and immortality, and how far it will be changed from animal to spiritual.¹ This question deserves to be treated more carefully and more attentively, especially because of the body of the Lord Himself, 'who reforms the body of our lowness, made like to the body of his glory,' that He may be able 'to subdue all things unto himself.'² Since,

³ Letter 92.

¹ 1 Cor. 15.53.

² Phil. 3.21.

then, God the Father sees the Son, and the Son sees the Father, undoubtedly we should not listen to those who will attribute vision only to bodies. Neither is it right to say that the Father does not see the Son, or that, if vision belongs only to bodies, He is endowed with a body in order to see. How shall we explain the fact that at the beginning of the world, before the Son had taken on the form of a servant,³ 'God saw the light, that it was good,' and the firmament and the sea and the dry land, and every herb and every tree, the sun, the moon, the stars, all living creatures that move upon the earth, the fowls of the air, the living soul? 'And afterward God saw all the things that he had made and behold they were very good.'⁴ After Scripture had repeated that so many times about all the several creatures, I wonder how that opinion could have arisen whereby sight is thought to belong to bodies only. But, from whatever habit of speech that opinion may have come, the holy Scriptures are not accustomed to speak thus; they attribute vision not only to the body, but also to the spirit, and more to the spirit than to the body. Otherwise they would not have been right in giving the name 'seers' to the prophets who saw the future, not by bodily but by spiritual sight.⁵

Chapter 51

But we must take thought not to venture into what is contrary to custom, by saying that through the glory of resurrection the body puts off not only its mortal and corruptible state, but even the very state of being a body, and becomes a spirit. In that case, either the substance of the spirit is

³ Phil. 2.7.

⁴ Gen. 1.4-31.

⁵ 1 Kings 9.9.

doubled, if the body becomes spirit, or, if the spirit of man is single, so as not to be doubled by the addition of another as a twin, when the body is changed and turned into spirit, and if it is not increased by any addition, it is to be feared that we are then saying nothing else than that bodies will not remain immortal after that change, but will cease to exist and will perish entirely. Therefore, until we examine carefully and discover, with the Lord's help, what the more probable opinion is about the spiritual body, which according to the Scriptures is promised at the resurrection, let it be enough for us meanwhile that the only-begotten Son, who is also the 'Mediator of God and men, the man, Christ Jesus,'¹ sees the Father as He is seen by the Father. For our part, let us not try to carry over that concupiscence of the eyes from this world to that vision of God, which is promised to us at the resurrection,² but let us strive for it with devout affection by cleansing our hearts, and let us not think of a corporeal face when the Apostle says: 'We see now through a glass, in a dark manner, but then face to face'; especially as the Apostle adds more definitely: 'now I know in part, but then I shall know even as I am known.'³ If we shall then know God by a corporeal face, we are known to Him now by a corporeal face, 'for then I shall know,' he says, 'even as I am known.' From this, who would not understand that in this passage he meant our face, of which he says in another place: 'But we, beholding the glory of the Lord with open face, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory as by the spirit of the Lord,'⁴ that is, from the glory of faith to the glory of eternal contemplation? No doubt this is effected by that transformation by which the 'inward man is renewed day

1 1 Tim. 2.5.

2 1 John 2.16.

3 1 Cor. 13.12.

4 2 Cor. 3.18.

by day.’⁵ The Apostle Peter was also referring to this when he warned of a wife’s adornment, and said: ‘Whose adorning let it not be the outward plaiting of the hair, or the wearing of gold and pearls, or fine apparel, but the hidden man of the heart which is rich in the sight of God.’⁶ By not going over to Christ, the Jews keep a veil over that face, since, when anyone does go over to Christ, the veil will be taken away, and ‘we with open face are transformed into the same image.’ Moreover, he says very plainly: ‘The veil is upon their heart.’⁷ There, then, is the face that shall be opened, and, although now we see through a glass in a dark manner, we shall then see face to face.

Chapter 52

If you agree, take up with me the statement of the holy man, Ambrose, which is founded, not on his authority, but on truth itself. My reason for liking it is not because the Lord freed me from error by his words, and granted me the grace of saving baptism by his ministry, as if I should be too partial to the one who planted and watered me,¹ but because, in this matter, he said what God who giveth the increase says to the soul which meditates devoutly and understands rightly. He said then: ‘Even in the resurrection itself it is not easy to see God, except for those who are clean of heart; hence: “Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.”’ How many kinds of blessed He had enumerated, yet to none of them had He promised the ability to see God! If, then, those who are clean of heart will see God, doubtless others will not see Him; the unworthy will not see Him, nor will

⁵ 2 Cor. 4.16.

⁶ Cf. 1 Peter 3.3,4.

⁷ 2 Cor. 3.15.

¹ 1 Cor. 3.7.

he who does not wish to see God be able to see Him. God is not seen in any locality, but in the clean heart; He is not sought by bodily eyes, nor limited by our sight, nor held by touch, nor heard by His utterance, nor perceived in His approach. When He is thought absent, He is seen; when He is present, He is not seen. Finally, not all the Apostles saw Christ. Therefore He says: "So long a time have I been with you, and you have not known me?" But he who knew "what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and the charity of Christ which surpasseth all knowledge," saw both Christ and the Father. For we do not now know Christ according to the flesh, but according to the spirit. For "our breath, Christ the Lord, is taken before our face," and may He in His mercy deign to fill us unto all the fullness of God, that we may be able to see Him.²

Chapter 53

To the extent that you understand these words of the saintly man, which are not carnal but spiritual, and recognize that they are true, not because he said them but because truth clamors in them without noise of words, to that extent you understand how you may cling to God, to that extent you prepare yourself inwardly as the incorporeal place of His dwelling, to hear the silence of His discourse, and to see His invisible form. Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God, not when He shall appear to them as a body coming from some intervening space, but when He shall come to them and make His dwelling with them, and thus they shall be filled unto all the fullness of God—not that they will be God in His fullness, but that they shall be perfectly filled with God. But, if we think of nothing but

2 Cf. above, Ch. 18.

corporeal objects, and we cannot even think worthily of the source of our thought about corporeal objects, let us not seek reproaches to make against ourselves; rather, let us cleanse our hearts of this carnal tendency by prayer and by turning to what lies before us. Let me tell you not only what blessed Ambrose but also what holy Jerome said: 'The eyes of the flesh can no more behold the divinity of the Father than they can that of the Son and the Holy Spirit, because there is one nature in the Trinity, but the eyes of the mind can, and of them the Saviour Himself said: "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God."' ¹ And according to the brief and true definition of the same Jerome: 'An incorporeal thing is not seen by corporeal eyes.'²

Chapter 54

My reason for inserting these opinions of such great men on such a great subject was not to make you think that anyone's interpretation should be accepted with the authority due to the canonical Scripture, but that those who are otherwise minded may try to see with their mind what is true, and to seek God in the simplicity of their heart,¹ and cease to find fault so rashly with the learned expounders of the divine words. And do not be influenced by any who say, without sufficient reflection: 'What then will the bodily eyes see if they will not see God? Will they be blind or useless?' Those who say this do not realize that if there are to be no bodies, there will be no bodily eyes, but if there are to be bodies there will be something for bodily eyes to see. But let

¹ Jerome, *Commentary on Isaias* 6.1 (PL 24.93).

² Jerome, *Commentary on Job* 42.5 (PL 26.1262) and *Commentary on Zacharias* 24.11 (PL 26.792).

¹ Wisd. 1.1.

this be enough to say, and when you consider, after reading and rereading all of it from the beginning of my treatise, you will probably perceive with certainty that a clean heart ought to prepare you, with His help, to see God. As for the spiritual body, I will try in another work to see what arguments I can find with the Lord's help.²

148. *A memorandum to his holy brother, Fortunatianus*¹
(413)

I now remind you of what I asked at our meeting, that you would be so kind as to see our brother,² of whom we spoke, and ask him to pardon me if he took any rather strong and emphatic remark of mine as directed against him in that letter, which I do not regret having written, in such way as to say that the eyes of this body do not see God and will not see Him. As a matter of fact, I added the reason why I said this: namely, to prevent the belief that God is Himself corporeal or visible in any locality or space relation—for the eye of this body can see in no other way—and also to prevent that expression, 'face to face,'³ from being taken to mean that God is limited by the parts of a body. Therefore, I do not regret having said this, because we should not have such an irreverent idea of God as to imagine that, instead of

2 *De civitate Dei* 22.29. In *Retractations* 2.41, Augustine says of the subject treated in this letter: 'I have written a book on the Vision of God, in which I undertook a careful examination of the future nature of the spiritual body at the resurrection of the saints, and whether and how God, who is a spirit, can be seen by a body; but that very difficult question at the end I explained as best I could in Book 22 of *The City of God*.'

1 Bishop of Sicca, one of the seven chosen to debate with the Donatists at the Conference of Carthage (411).

2 A brother bishop, not named, but suspected of anthropomorphism.

3 1 Cor. 13.12.

being everywhere wholly present, He can be distributed through portions of space. These latter are the kinds of objects we know through our eyes.

Now, suppose a man has no such idea of God, but believes Him to be a changeless and incorporeal spirit, everywhere present, if he imagines that this body of ours will undergo such a change when it turns from animal to spiritual that even with such a body we shall be able to see that incorporeal substance without space relations, neither distributed through portions of space, nor limited by bodily features and dimensions, but everywhere wholly present, I wish he would enlighten me, if his opinion is true. However, if he is wrong in this, it is much more endurable to have him arrogate something to the body than to derogate from God. And if his opinion is true, it will not contradict my words, as I expressed myself in that letter. I said that the eyes of this body can see nothing but corporeal objects, which are separated from them by some intervening space, because, if there is no intervening space, we do not see those objects through the eyes.

Moreover, if our bodies are going to be changed into something so unlike themselves that they will have eyes capable of seeing that substance which is not distributed through portions of space, nor limited by it, having one part here, another there, a smaller part in a smaller space, a larger part in a larger space, but, everywhere incorporeally wholly present, these bodies will be something very different. They will not be different merely through the removal of mortality, corruption, and the weight of matter, but they will be changed in some way into the very quality of the mind itself, if they are going to be able to see in a way which will be granted to the mind then, but which is not granted even to the mind at present. If, when a man's behavior is changed, we say he is not the man he was; if, with the changes brought on by age, we

say the body is not what it was, how much greater the change wrought by that transformation, which not only makes it live forever, but even makes it see the invisible! Therefore, if they are to see God, it will not be the eyes of this body that will see Him, because the body will not be changed so as to have such power and ability as to do that, and that opinion is not opposed to what I said in my letter. But, if it will only not be itself to this extent that it is now mortal, but then immortal, now weighing down the soul, but then freed of weight and able to move with ease, to see those things which are perceived in spatial relations and are separated by intervening space, if it will not be other than itself, then it will absolutely not see the incorporeal substance which is everywhere wholly present. Whether this view or that be true, the second one of the two is true: that the eyes of this body will not see God, for either they will belong to this body and they will not see Him, or they will not belong to it if they do see Him, since after such a change they will belong to a far different body.

However, I am ready, if this brother has some better knowledge of this matter, to learn either from him or from his source of knowledge. If I were speaking in mockery, I would say that I am ready to learn even that theory of a corporeal God with separate parts occupying different places. I do not say this because I am not speaking in mockery; I am entirely sure that such a God does not exist, and I wrote that letter to forestall belief in such a one. And, while I was careful to convey my rebuke without mentioning names, I showed too great a disregard for the character of a brother and a bishop; I did not think of him in the manner a brother and a bishop ought to do. I do not condone this, I condemn it; I do not excuse it, I blame it; I ask pardon for it; let him remember our early affection and forget this latest offense. Let him by all means do what he was angry with me for not doing: let

him show his mildness by making the allowance for me which I did not make for him in writing that letter. I ask through your Charity what I should have liked to ask him in person if I had the opportunity of meeting him. When I had tried to do so through the letter of a man worthy of respect and excelling all of us in honor, he would not come, probably suspecting some trick on my part, according to the usual run of human affairs, I suppose. Do you, to the best of your ability, get him to believe that I am far removed from that, and you can do it more easily because you are in personal touch with him. Tell him how deep and how true my sorrow was, when I spoke to you of the hurt I had done to his heart. Let him know that I do not look down on him, that I greatly fear God in him, and that I think of our Head, in whose body we are brothers.⁴ I think it would not do for me to go to the place where he lives, because it might be a subject of ridicule for strangers, of grief for ours, and of shame for us. All this can be properly accomplished by your Holiness and Charity; it certainly is accomplished by Him who dwells by faith in your heart.⁵ I trust our friend will not turn from Him in you when he recognizes Him in himself.

In this matter, I have certainly not found anything better to do than to ask pardon of my brother, who has complained of being hurt by the sharpness of my letter. I hope he himself will do what he knows is enjoined on him by Him who spoke by the Apostle when he said: 'Forgiving one another, if any have a complaint against another, even as God has forgiven you in Christ.'⁶ 'By ye therefore followers of God as most dear children, and walk in love as Christ also hath loved you.'⁷ Walking in this love, let us examine peaceably and as carefully

⁴ Col. 1.18.

⁵ Eph. 3.17.

⁶ Cf. Col. 3.13.

⁷ Cf. Eph. 5.1,2.

as we can into this question of the spiritual body which we shall have at the resurrection, because, 'if we are otherwise minded, this also God will reveal to us,'⁸ if we abide in Him. 'For he that abideth in charity, abideth in God and God in him,' because 'God is charity,'⁹ whether He exists as its ineffable fount or grants it to us through His Spirit. If, then, it can be taught that charity will be seen at some time by bodily eyes, perhaps it will be possible for God, also, but, if charity will never be so seen, much less will its fount be seen, even if anything higher or more appropriate can be said of so sublime a subject.

Certain eminent men, deeply versed in the holy Scriptures, who have greatly helped the Church and the exemplary studies of the faithful by their writings have said, when occasion was offered them, that the invisible God is invisibly seen, that is, by that nature which is also invisible in us, namely, by the clean mind and heart. When blessed Ambrose was treating of Christ as the Word, he said:¹⁰ 'Jesus is not seen by corporeal, but by spiritual eyes,' and a little further on: 'The Jews did not see Him, for their foolish heart was blinded,'¹¹ showing by this how He is seen. Likewise, when he was speaking of the Holy Spirit, he inserted the words of the Lord when He said: 'I will ask the Father and he shall give you another Paraclete, that he may abide with you forever; the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive because it seeth him not nor knoweth him.'¹² 'With good reason, then,' he says, 'did He show Himself in the body, since He is not seen in the substance of the divinity. We have seen the Spirit, but it was under a corporeal appearance; let us see the Father, also, but, since we cannot see Him, let us

8 Phil. 3.15.

9 1 John 4.16.

10 *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* 1.5,6. (CSEL 32).

11 Mark 6.52.

12 John 14.16,17.

hear Him.' And a little later he says: 'Let us then hear the Father, for the Father is invisible, but the Son is also invisible'¹³ according to His divinity, 'for no man hath seen God at any time.'¹⁴ Since, then, the Son is God, inasmuch as He is God, the Son is not seen.

The saintly Jerome says: 'The eye of man cannot see God as He is in His own nature, and this is true not only of man, but also of Angels, Thrones, Powers and Dominations, as well as of any creatures that can be named, for the creature cannot behold its Creator.'¹⁵ In these words that learned man shows clearly enough what he thinks about the world to come, which has a bearing on this question. For, to whatever degree our eyes are changed for the better, they will resemble the eyes of the angels. But he also said that the nature of the Creator is invisible both to them and to any heavenly being whatever. Now, if from this any question originates or any doubt arises whether we shall not be better endowed than the angels, we have this plain statement of the Lord, when He said of those who are to rise again to enter the kingdom: 'They shall be like the angels of God.'¹⁶ On this point the same holy Jerome speaks thus in another place:¹⁷ 'Therefore, man cannot see the face of God, but the angels of even the least in the Church see the face of God.'¹⁸ "We see now through a glass in a dark manner, but then face to face,"¹⁹ when we shall have advanced from the state of men to that of angels, and shall be able to say with the Apostle: "But we all beholding the glory of the Lord with open face, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the

¹³ Col. 1.15; 1 Tim. 1.17.

¹⁴ John 1.18; 1 John 4.12.

¹⁵ Source of quotation unknown.

¹⁶ Matt. 22.30; Mark 12.25; Luke 20.36.

¹⁷ *Commentary on Isaias* 1.10 (PL 24.33).

¹⁸ Matt. 18.10.

¹⁹ 1 Cor. 13.12.

Spirit of the Lord,"²⁰ although it is true that no creature may see the face of God according to His essential nature, but, when He is believed in, then He is seen by the mind.'

In these words of the man of God, there are many points to consider: first, that according to the very clear statement of the Lord he himself thinks that we shall see the face of God when we have advanced to the state of angels, that is, when we become like the angels, which will obviously be at the resurrection of the dead. Secondly, he shows plainly by the testimony of the Apostle that we are to understand the face of the interior, not of the exterior man, when we shall see face to face, because the Apostle was evidently speaking of the face of the heart when he said what was quoted on this: 'We beholding the glory of the Lord with open face are transformed into the same image.' If anyone doubts of this, let him review that passage and notice what the Apostle was speaking about, namely, the veil which 'remaineth in the reading of the Old Testament,' until each one is converted to Christ, that the veil may be taken away. It was then he said: 'But we beholding the glory of the Lord with open face,' a face which was not open among the Jews, of whom he said: 'the veil is upon their heart,'²¹ to show that the face of our heart is opened when the veil is removed. Finally, to prevent anyone who might be unobservant and indiscriminating from believing that God is visible either to angels or men—when we have become like the angels—either now or in the future, he expressed his opinion in the clearest terms when he said that no creature may see the face of God according to His essential nature, but, when He is believed in, then He is seen by the mind. From this he has made it quite evident that when He has been seen by men with bodily eyes, as if He were Himself corporeal, He has not been seen according to His essential nature, for in that He is seen by the mind when He

20 2 Cor. 3.18.

21 2 Cor. 3.14-16.

is believed in. And, since He is invisible even to the heavenly beings, unless He appears in corporeal aspect, how much more is this true of dwellers on the earth?

In another place²² he said even more plainly: 'It is not alone the Godhead of the Father, but even that of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, which is one nature in the Trinity, that cannot be seen by the eyes of the flesh, but only by the eyes of the mind, of which the Saviour Himself said: "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God."'²³ What is clearer than this line of argument? If he had merely said that the Godhead of neither Father nor Son nor Holy Spirit, which is one nature in the Trinity, could be seen by the eyes of the flesh, and had not added at once 'but the eyes of the mind,' perhaps someone might have said that it was no longer to be called flesh when the body had become spiritual. Thus, by adding this and saying 'eyes of the mind,' he differentiated this kind of vision from every bodily kind. And, lest anyone think that he had spoken only of the present time, he appended the testimony of the Lord, wishing to show what he meant by eyes of the mind, since in this testimony promise is made not of present but of future sight: 'Blessed are the clean of heart for they shall see God.'

The most blessed Athanasius,²⁴ Bishop of Alexandria, when he was arguing against the Arians, who say that only God the Father is invisible, but think that the Son and the Holy Spirit are visible, proved by the authority of holy Scriptures and by his own careful reasoning that the Trinity is equally invisible, pressing the point vigorously that God has not been seen except by taking the appearance of a creature; that, according to the essential nature of His Godhead, God is completely invisible, that is, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, except in so far as He can be known by mind and spirit.

²² *Commentary on Isaias* 3.1 (PL 24.93).

²³ Matt. 5.8.

²⁴ *Orationes adversus Arrianos* 1.631 4.14; 4.36 (PG 36.114,352,524).

Gregory,²⁵ also, a holy bishop of the East, said plainly that when God, invisible by nature, appeared to the patriarchs, as to Moses, with whom He spoke face to face,²⁶ He could be seen only by taking on some combination of visible matter, preserving His invisibility intact. This is also what our Ambrose said: that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are seen under that appearance which their will has chosen but their nature has not formed.²⁷ This conforms to the truth of the saying that 'No man hath seen God at any time,' which is the word of the Lord Christ Himself, and of this: 'Whom no man hath seen nor can see,'²⁸ which is the word of the Apostle, or rather of Christ through His Apostle; thus, those testimonies of the Scriptures are not repudiated wherein it is said that God has been seen, because He is both invisible by the essential nature of the Godhead, and can be seen when He wills by means of a created form taken according to His pleasure.

Moreover, if His nature is invisible, as it is immortal, that nature will certainly not be changed in a future life, so as to turn from invisible to visible, because it will not be possible for it to turn from immortal to mortal, for it is at the same time unchangeable. Doubtless, the Apostle praised His nature when he set down these two qualities together, saying: 'Now to the king of ages, invisible and immortal, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever.'²⁹ Therefore, I do not venture to make a distinction by saying 'to the immortal forever and ever,' but to the invisible not forever and ever, but only in this life. However, as those testimonies cannot be false which say: 'Blessed are the clean of heart for they shall

25 Gregory Nazianzen (328-390) *De Filii divinitate et consubstantialitate tractatus*, a treatise now variously attributed to Gregory of Elvira (died c.392) or to Phoebadius of Agen (end of 4th century).

26 Exod. 33.11.

27 Letter 147.

28 1 Tim. 6.16.

29 1 Tim. 1.17.

see God' and 'We know that when he shall appear, we shall be like to him because we shall see him as he is,'³⁰ we cannot deny that the children of God will see God, but it will be as invisible things are seen, as He promised to show Himself when He appeared to men visibly in the flesh and said: 'And I will love him and will manifest myself to him,'³¹ being in full view before the eyes of men when He spoke. But how are invisible things seen except by the eyes of the heart, as I mentioned a short time ago when I quoted Jerome's opinion about the vision of God?

For this reason, the above-mentioned Bishop of Milan said that even in the resurrection it is not easy to see God, except for those who are clean of heart, and therefore it is written: 'Blessed are the clean of heart for they shall see God.' He says: 'How many kinds of blessed He had enumerated, yet to none of them had He promised the ability to see God!' Then he went on and said: 'If, then, those who are clean of heart will see God, doubtless others will not see Him.'³² And lest we should take those others to be the ones of whom it is said: 'Blessed are the poor; blessed are the meek,'³³ and the rest, he forthwith adds: 'The unworthy will not see God,' evidently intending us to understand that, although those unworthy will rise again, they will not be able to see God, since they will rise to damnation because they refused to cleanse their hearts by the true faith 'that worketh by charity.'³⁴ Thereupon he follows up and says: 'Nor is he who does not wish to see God able to see Him.' Then, because it occurred to him that all the wicked do wish to see God, he at once went on to show what he meant by 'he who does not wish to see God,' since, obviously, the wicked soul does

³⁰ 1 John 3.2.

³¹ John 14.21.

³² Cf. Letter 147.

³³ Matt. 5.3,4.

³⁴ Gal. 5.6.

not wish to see God in the measure in which he refuses to cleanse his heart so that he may see Him; and he says: 'God is not seen in any locality, but in the clean heart; God is not sought by bodily eyes, nor limited by our sight, nor held by touch, nor heard by His utterance, nor perceived in His approach.' By those words blessed Ambrose intended to warn men who wish to see God what their preparation ought to be, that is, to cleanse their heart by faith 'that worketh by charity,' by the gift of the Holy Spirit from whom we receive the pledge³⁵ by which we know that we desire that vision.

In regard to the various members of God, to which Scripture constantly refers, the same Scripture says that God has wings,³⁶ which we obviously have not, to prevent us from believing that we are like God according to the form and figure of this flesh. As, then, we think of protection when we hear 'wing,' so we ought to think of action when we hear 'hands,' and of presence when we hear 'feet,' and of sight by which one acquires knowledge when we hear 'eyes,' and of acquaintance by which one is made known when we hear 'face.' If the same Scripture makes any other such reference, I think it is to be understood in a spiritual sense, and I am not the only one or the first one to think so, but all who are endowed with any kind of spiritual understanding do so when they oppose those who are called anthropomorphists. And not to draw this out much longer, by many quotations from their writings, I include this one passage from holy Jerome, to let that brother know that, if anything stirs him to opposition in this matter, he does not have to deal with me alone, but even more with my predecessors.

When, then, that man, so learned in the Scriptures, was commenting on the psalm³⁷ where it says: 'Understand, ye

³⁵ 2 Cor. 5.5.

³⁶ Ps. 16.8.

³⁷ Ps. 93.8,9.

senseless among the people: and you fools be wise at last. He that hath planted the ear, shall he not hear? or he that hath formed the eye, doth he not consider?" he said, among other things: "This passage is directed chiefly against the anthropomorphists who say that God has members such as we have. For example, God is said to have eyes: the eyes of the Lord look upon all things; the hand of the Lord makes all things; and it says: "Adam heard the footsteps of the Lord walking in paradise."³⁸ They take these expressions literally, and they attribute our human inadequacies to the magnificence of God. But I say that God is all eye, He is all hand, He is all foot. He is all eye because He sees all things; He is all hand because He effects all things; He is all foot because He is everywhere present. See, then, what it says: "He that hath planted the ear, doth he not hear?" It does not say: "He that hath planted, doth he not then have an ear?" and it does not say: "doth he not then have eyes?" What does it say? "He that hath planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that hath formed the eye, doth he not consider?" He brought together the members, he gave the faculties."³⁹

I have thought well to give all these quotations from the works of Latin and Greek writers who have lived before us in the Catholic Church, and have expounded the divine words, to let that brother know that, if any view of his differs from theirs, it is to be examined and either learned or taught with careful and quiet attention, after laying aside any bitterness of dissension, restoring and preserving in its integrity the sweetness of fraternal charity. Still, we are not obliged to regard the arguments of any writers, however Catholic and estimable they may be, as we do the canonical Scriptures, so that we may not—with all due respect to the deference owed them as men—refute or reject anything we happen to find in

38 Gen. 3.8. What Adam heard was the *voice* of the Lord God in paradise.

39 *Breviarium in Psalmum* 93 (PL 26.1108).

their writings wherein their opinions differ from the established truth, or from what has been thought out by others or by us, with divine help. I wish other thinkers to hold the same attitude toward my writings as I hold toward theirs. To sum up, with all these excerpts which I have quoted from the works of holy and learned men, Ambrose, Jerome, Athanasius, Gregory, and others whom I might have cited to the same effect, if I had not thought it would take too long, I believe with unshaken faith, by the help of the Lord, and, as far as He grants it, I understand that God is not corporeal, that He has no members of a human form, that He cannot be distributed through parts of space, that He is by nature unchangeably invisible, that He has not appeared in that same nature and substance, but when He is described in the holy Scriptures as having been seen by bodily eyes He has shown Himself as He willed and to whom He willed by taking a visible appearance.

Concerning the spiritual body which we shall have at the resurrection and how much of a change it will undergo for the better, there are many other difficulties which can engage us: whether it will be merged into the simplicity of the soul so that the whole man becomes spirit, or whether, as I think more likely, but have not sufficient certitude to affirm, it will become a body so spiritual that it may be called spiritual because of some indescribable facility it will have, while retaining the corporeal substance which can have life and consciousness only through the soul which makes use of it—and even now the soul and body have not the same nature, since the body is called animal—whether, if the nature of the body is retained, although in an immortal and incorruptible state, it will then help the soul to see visible, that is, corporeal, objects, as now we are unable to see such an object except through the body, or whether our soul will then have the ability to know corporeal things without the intervention of

any bodily organ (for God does not know material objects through bodily senses)—on these matters I confess that I have not yet read anything which I think satisfactory either to learn or to teach.

Consequently, if this warning of mine, such as it is, does not displease this brother, let us, to the best of our ability, and with His help, make ready a clean heart for that vision according to what is written: 'that we shall see him as he is.'⁴⁰ And let us examine peacefully and carefully into the question of the spiritual body, if so be that God might deign to point out to us, according to His Scriptures, something clear and certain, if He knows that this will be useful to us. If a more careful inquiry should discover that the body will undergo such a change as to be able to see the invisible, I do not think that such a power in the body would deprive the mind of its sight, so that the exterior man would then be able to see God, but the interior one could not, as if God were only exterior to man and not interiorly in man, since it is most plainly written: 'that God may be all in all';⁴¹ or that He should be interiorly in man so as to be seen exteriorly by the exterior man but not interiorly by the interior man, whereas He is wholly present everywhere without any spatial relations. If these suppositions are absurd—for it is more likely that the saints will be filled with God; they will not be empty within and surrounded by Him without, nor will they be blind within and unable to see Him who fills them, but furnished with eyes exteriorly and able to see Him only as they are surrounded by Him—it remains a fact that meantime we have complete certainty of the vision of God according to the interior man. If, then, the body attains this by some marvellous change, something will be added, nothing will be taken away.

It will be better for us, then, to assert what we do not

40 1 John 3.2.

41 1 Cor. 15.28.

doubt, that the interior man will see God, as it alone is now able to see charity, which is praised in these words: 'God is charity,'⁴² as it alone is able to see 'peace and holiness without which no man shall see God.'⁴³ For, it is no bodily eye which, at present, beholds charity, peace, holiness and other things of like nature; it is the eye of the mind which now sees all these things, to the extent of its ability, and it sees them with greater clarity in proportion to its own purity. Thus, whether or not we reach the conclusion we are seeking about the nature of the future body, we may believe without reserve that we shall see God, since we are certain, in spite of all, that the body will rise again, and that it will be immortal and incorruptible. We possess the clearest and strongest assurances on this point from the holy Scriptures. Nevertheless, if that brother now takes to himself as a matter of complete certainty what I am still only formulating about the spiritual body, he will have good reason to be angry if I do not listen patiently to his exposition of it, so long as he listens patiently to my inquiry. Now, however, I ask you in Christ's Name to beg his pardon for me for that sharpness in my letter which I hear has offended him with good reason, and to gladden me by your answer, with the Lord's help.

⁴² 1 John 4.8.

⁴³ Heb. 12.14.

149. *Augustine gives greeting in the Lord to his blessed, reverently esteemed and estimably revered, holy and religiously cherished brother and fellow bishop, Paulinus¹ (414)*

The Lord has suddenly gladdened us by your letter with its tidings of the safe arrival of our brother and fellow priest, Quintus, and those who sailed with him, so, with thanks to Him 'who lifteth up them that are cast down, and consoleth the lowly,'² as well as to the sincerity of your heart, I am taking advantage of the imminent departure of my son, our fellow deacon, Rufinus, who is sailing from the port of Hippo, to answer you and thus pay my debt. I approve the kindly plan which the Lord has inspired in you, and which you have been so kind as to suggest to me. May He also further it, may He favor it, as He has already greatly relieved my anxiety, since that much-loved man has been borne along and commended not only by his good works, but also by your holy prayers.

I received the letter of your Reverence, in which you asked me many questions, roused me to examine into many points, and taught me by your requests. I answered at once and sent my letter by the bearers of those same holy consolers of ours, but I learn from your latest that mine was not delivered to your Reverence. I cannot recall how far I went in that letter toward answering your questions; when I looked for a copy, by way of verifying it, I could not find one. However, I am quite sure that I did answer some of your questions, but I did not finish all of them because the bearer was in a hurry and kept urging me to make an end of it. I sent with it, as you requested, a copy of the letter which I wrote

¹ Bishop of Nola. This is an answer to Letter 121, written in 410, although it is supposed that intervening letters were lost.

² Cf. Ps. 145.8.

you from Carthage on the resurrection of the body, in which the question of bodily functions was raised. I am sending this now, as well as a copy of another which I surmise did not come to hand either, since you have asked the same questions again which, as I reread it, I see that I answered. I have no idea whom I charged with that letter. But the letter of your Charity—I did not see the bearer—to which mine was the answer, as it shows, was forwarded to me by our people at Hippo, when I was staying with my holy brother and fellow bishop, Boniface,³ and I answered immediately, without delay.

As I wrote you then, I had not been able to consult any Greek texts on certain words of Psalm 16, but afterward I secured some and consulted them. One of them had the same reading as our Latin text: 'destroying them from the earth, divide them'; another text had what you wrote: 'from the few of the earth.'⁴ But the former has a clear meaning: 'destroying them from the earth,' which Thou hast given them, 'divide them' among the Gentiles, which also happened to them when they were overwhelmed and overthrown by a dread war. I have no idea how the second version is to be understood, unless it means that, in contrast with the destroyed people, some remnants of them were saved, at least among the few of them of whom the Scripture says that they are to be divided, that is, distributed and separated, saying: 'Lord, from the few,' that is, from the remnants which Thou hast saved of the people, 'divide them from the earth,' to make us understand by earth the Church, the inheritance of the faithful and the holy, which is also called the land of the living,⁵ and which can be correctly understood of this passage:

³ Bishop of Cataqua, one of those present at the Conference of Carthage (411).

⁴ Cf. Ps. 16.14.

⁵ Ps. 26.13; 51.7; 141.6.

'Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the land'⁶ by inheritance. But, when it says: 'From the few of the earth, divide them,' it adds 'in their life,' to make clear that this will happen while they live here. Many, during their lifetime, seem to be joined to the Catholic Church and its unity, by partaking of the sacraments, but when they die they are separated from the Church. These, then, are divided from the few believers among them, from the earth, which the Father cultivates as a farmer his field, but they are divided in their life, that is, openly, as we see. But it continues: 'Their belly is filled from thy hidden stores,'⁷ that is, in addition to their being openly divided, 'their belly is filled even from thy hidden stores,' which thou dost bestow in secret on the conscience of the wicked; here he uses 'belly' to represent the secrets which are hidden within.

As to the following passage, 'They are full of pork', I have explained what I think of it. What readings other texts have or are truthfully reported to have—because the more carefully written copies explain this same well-known ambiguity of the Greek word by the accent,⁸ according to the Greek method of writing—is a matter somewhat obscure, but it seems to fit in better with the more acceptable meaning. He had said: 'Their belly is filled from thy hidden stores,' by which words the hidden judgments of God are meant, and no doubt they are hidden from the wretched, who rejoice even in evil, whom 'God gave up to the desires of their heart.'⁹ It is as if the question were asked how those who are filled in secret with the anger of God can be known, and the answer would be what is said in the Gospel: 'By their fruits you shall know

6 Matt. 5.4.

7 Ps. 16.14.

8 *Uion*, of sons, has a form *uon*; *sus*, pig, also has a genitive plural *uon*. The ambiguity arises rather from the omission of the letter *iota* than from the similarity of accent.

9 Rom. 1.24.

them,¹⁰ and this is followed by: 'They are full of children,'¹¹ that is, of fruits, which evidently means their works. Hence, we read elsewhere: 'Behold he hath been in labor with iniquity: he hath conceived sorrow and brought forth iniquity,'¹² and in another passage: 'Then when concupiscence hath conceived it bringeth forth sin.'¹³ Therefore, the evil children are the evil works, by which they are known, and it is as if their belly were filled from the hidden stores of God by His interior judgments of their thoughts: the good children are good works. For this reason He says to the Church, His spouse: 'Thy teeth are as a flock of sheep that are shorn, which come up from the washing, all with twins, and there is none barren among them.'¹⁴ By this twin offspring the twofold object of love is meant, namely, God and the neighbor: 'On these two commandments dependeth the whole law and the prophets.'¹⁵

That interpretation by which the passage: 'They are filled with children,' is thus expounded had not occurred to me when I wrote to you before, but in revising a very short commentary on the same psalm which I had dictated long ago, I discovered that I had set that down rather briefly. I also looked at the Greek texts to see whether the word translated by 'children' was in the dative case or the genitive, which has the uses of the ablative in that language, and I found it was the genitive. If it were translated literally it would read: 'They are full of children,' but the translator has correctly followed the sense and has rendered it in the Latin idiom: 'They are filled with children.' In the following: 'And they have left to their little ones the rest of their substance,'¹⁶

10 Matt. 7.16.

11 This is the Vulgate reading.

12 Ps. 7.15.

13 James 1.15.

14 Cant. 4.2.

15 Matt. 22.40.

16 Ps. 16.14.

I think 'little ones' is to be taken simply as children of the flesh. Thus, according to this explanation of the reading 'of children,' not 'of pork,' we have that sentence which they uttered: 'His blood be upon us and upon our children,'¹⁷ and this is how they left to their little ones the rest of their works.

In Psalm 15, in the words: 'He made wonderful' or 'Let him make wonderful all his desires among them,'¹⁸ nothing prevents us from accepting the reading 'in them' for 'among them'; in fact, it seems a more fitting rendering. That is what the Greek texts have, but often, when that language has 'in them,' our texts translate 'among them,' when it seems to fit the sense. Let us take it, then: 'To the saints who are in his land, he hath made wonderful all his desires in them,' which most of the texts have, and let us understand by 'his desires' the gifts of that grace which is given freely, that is, because He willed it, not because it was due. In the same way we have: 'Thou hast crowned us as with a shield of thy good will,'¹⁹ and: 'By thy will thou hast conducted me,'²⁰ and: 'Of his own will hath he begotten us by the word of truth,'²¹ and: 'Thou hast set aside for thy inheritance, O God, a free rain,'²² and: 'Dividing to everyone according as he will,'²³ and numberless other passages. Consequently, 'He hath made wonderful all his desires in them,' that is, to whom, if not 'to his saints who are in his land'? For, if 'land,' as we showed above, can be taken in a good sense without adding 'his,' how much more when it says 'his land'? Therefore, He has made wonderful all His desires in them; indeed, He has

17 Matt. 27.25.

18 Ps. 15.3.

19 Ps. 5.13.

20 Ps. 72.24.

21 James 1.18.

22 Ps. 67.10.

23 1 Cor. 12.11.

made them wonderful, in that He wonderfully freed them from despair.

In admiration of this the Apostle cries out: 'O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God.' He had said before: 'God hath concluded all in unbelief, that he may have mercy on all.'²⁴ This is what follows in the psalm: 'Their infirmities are multiplied, afterwards they made haste.'²⁵ He puts infirmities for sins, as the Apostle says to the Romans: 'For if Christ when as yet we were weak died for the ungodly'; here he calls the weak ungodly. Then a little later, repeating the same thought, he says: 'God commendeth his charity towards us, because when as yet we were sinners, Christ died for us;' here he calls sinners those whom he called weak above. In the same manner, in subsequent verses, he develops the same idea in other words: 'For if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.' Therefore, by the words: 'Their infirmities were multiplied,' we understand that their sins were multiplied. For 'the law entered in that sin might abound,' but since 'where sin abounded grace did more abound,'²⁶ therefore 'afterwards they made haste.' 'He has not come to call the just but sinners, for they that are in health need not a physician, but they that are ill,'²⁷ whose infirmities are obviously multiplied so that the remedy of so great a grace is needed to heal them, and that he to whom many sins are forgiven should love much.²⁸

The ashes of a heifer and the sprinkling of blood and the multiplying of bloody victims signified this, but did not effect it. Therefore, it says afterward: 'I will not gather together their meetings for blood-offerings,' that is, the blood of those

²⁴ Rom. 11.33,32.

²⁵ Ps. 15.4.

²⁶ Rom. 5.6,8,10.

²⁷ Matt. 7.13,12; Mark 2.17; Luke 5.32.

²⁸ Luke 7.47.

sacrifices which were immolated as a figure of the blood of Christ, 'nor will I be mindful of their names by my lips.'²⁹ Doubtless their names were found in that multiple list of infirmities: 'fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, liars with mankind, thieves, covetous, extortioners, drunkards, railers,' and any others who 'shall not possess the kingdom of God.' But where sin did abound, grace did more abound, and afterward they made haste, for these things are past, 'but you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.'³⁰ For this reason He will not be mindful of their names by His lips. It is true that the texts that have been more carefully corrected and enjoy a higher degree of authority have 'my desires,'³¹ instead of 'his desires,' but the effect is the same, because the words are spoken in the person of the Son of God. It is clear that He speaks in person, since those words so clearly point to Him, and the Apostles used the same words when they said: 'Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell nor wilt thou give thy holy one to see corruption.'³² Inasmuch as the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit possess the same gifts of grace, it is eminently right for the Son to call them His desires.

As for what is meant in Psalm 58 when it says of the Jews: 'Slay them not, lest at any time they forget my law,'³³ it seems to me appropriate to consider it a prophecy: thus, that same race, even when defeated and overcome, would not yield to the superstitions of the victorious people, but would remain firm in the Old Law, thus preserving over the whole earth the testimony of the Scriptures whence the Church was to be called into being. There is no clearer testimony to prove to

²⁹ Ps. 15.4.

³⁰ Cf. 1 Cor. 6.9-11.

³¹ Ps. 15.3.

³² Acts 2.27, from Ps. 15.10.

³³ Cf. Ps. 58.12.

the nations this salutary fact that the Name of Christ attained its pre-eminent authority as the hope of eternal salvation by no sudden and unexpected contrivance of the spirit of human presumption, but was foretold and written down long before. If that prophecy were not proved from the texts of His enemies, what else would they think it was but something invented by our texts? Therefore, 'Slay them not'—do not blot out the very name of the race—'lest at any time they forget thy law,' which would certainly have happened if they had been compelled to accept the rites and sacrifices of the Gentiles and had failed to preserve the very name of their own religion. What was written of Cain was a figure of them, that 'the Lord set a mark upon him that no one should kill him.'³⁴ Finally, after saying: 'Slay them not, lest at any time they forget thy law,' as if in answer to the question what was to be done to them so that they might escape death, to further the purpose of giving testimony to the truth, that is, they should not be destroyed and should not forget the Law of God, it adds at once: 'Scatter them by thy power.'³⁵ For, if they had remained in one part of the earth, they would not have added their testimony to the preaching of the Gospel, which bears fruit all over the world.³⁶ Therefore: 'Scatter them by thy power,' that they who denied, persecuted, and killed Him may everywhere bear witness to Him by that very Law which they do not forget, and which foretold Him whom they do not follow. But it does them no good not to forget it, for it is one thing to hold the Law of God in memory, and another to understand it and carry it out.

You ask what is meant by these words in Psalm 67: 'But God shall break the heads of his enemies: the hairy crown of them that walk on in their sins.'³⁷ It seems to me it means

³⁴ Cf. Gen. 4.15.

³⁵ Ps. 58.12.

³⁶ Col. 1.6.

³⁷ Ps. 67.22. In Letter 121, Paulinus had wrongly given this as Psalm 66.

simply that God will break the heads of His enemies who are too overweening, who rise too high in their sins. By a certain hyperbole he describes pride as rising so high and rushing along with such eagerness that it is like striding and running over the hair of the head. Likewise, in the same psalm, where it says: 'The tongue of thy dogs from the enemies by the same,'³⁸ dogs should not always be taken in an evil sense, otherwise the Prophet would not blame 'dogs not able to bark and loving to dream':³⁹ doubtless they would be praiseworthy dogs if they both knew how to bark and loved to watch. And certainly those 300 men⁴⁰—a most sacred number according to the letter of the Cross⁴¹—would not have been chosen to win the victory because they lapped water as dogs do, unless some great mystery were signified. Good dogs watch and bark to protect their house and their master, their flock and their shepherd. Finally, even here in the praises offered by the Church, when a selection is made from this prophecy, it is the tongue of dogs that is mentioned, not their teeth. 'The tongue of thy dogs,' it says, 'from the enemies,' that is, that those who used to be thy enemies and raged against thee may become thy dogs and may bark for thee. It added 'from the same' to make them understand that this is not effected by themselves, but 'by the same,' that is, by His mercy and grace.

Concerning the Prophets mentioned by the Apostle when he says that in the Church 'God gave some apostles and some prophets,'⁴² I understand it as you wrote it, that in this passage he means those Prophets of whom Agabus⁴³ was one,

³⁸ Ps. 67.24.

³⁹ Isa. 56.10.

⁴⁰ Judges 7.5-7. This was the band with which Gideon defeated the Midianites.

⁴¹ C is the symbol for 100; it is the initial letter of *crux*; this would make CCC most sacred.

⁴² Eph. 4.11.

⁴³ Acts 11.27,28.

not those who foretold the coming of the Lord in the flesh. But we find Evangelists of whom we read that they were not Apostles, as Mark and Luke. As to 'pastors and doctors,' whom you earnestly wished me to distinguish, I think they are the same, as you also did, so that we do not take some as pastors and others as doctors. That is why, after he had mentioned pastors first, he added doctors, to let pastors know that teaching is part of their duty. He did not say 'some pastors and some doctors,' but, after he had differentiated the previous terms by listing each one with its distinguishing word, 'some apostles and some prophets and other some evangelists,' he joined these two nouns as if they were one term: 'and other some pastors and doctors.'

I must say it is very difficult to make a distinction in that passage where he writes to Timothy and says: 'I desire therefore first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made.'⁴⁴ In the Greek language they are distinguishable, but few translators can be found among us who have taken the trouble to render them carefully and intelligently. Notice what you yourself wrote: 'I supplicate supplications,' where the Apostle, who undoubtedly wrote this letter in Greek, did not use the same word for both, but where the Latin has '*obsecro*' [I supplicate], he used the Greek '*parakaleo*' [I demand] and where your Latin writer has '*obsecrationes* [supplications], he had '*deēseis*' [entreaties]. However, other texts, including ours, have '*deprecationes*' [invocations] instead of '*obsecrationes*.' Most of the Latin texts have the other three words which follow: 'prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings.'

If, then, we try to differentiate these forms of expression according to the peculiarities of the Latin language, we shall hold to our own knowledge, such as it is, but I shall be sur-

⁴⁴ 1 Tim. 2.1.

prised if we keep to the meaning and usage of the Greek speech. Many of our people think that there is no difference between '*precatio*' and '*deprecatio*,' and in daily use that has generally held good, but those who speak Latin with greater precision use '*precatio*' to ask for good things, '*deprecatio*' to ward off evils. They claim that '*precari*' means to ask God for good things in our prayers; '*imprecari*' to call down evil, which is usually expressed nowadays by '*maledicere*' [curse]; '*deprecari*' to ward off evil by prayer. However, let us rather follow the present-day usage of speech; whether we find '*precationes*' or '*deprecationes*' in our text, which in Greek is '*deēseis*,' let us not think we have to correct it. It is an extremely difficult matter to distinguish '*orationes*,' which in Greek is '*proseuchas*,' from '*preces*' or '*precationes*.' The fact that some texts have '*adorationes*' [adorations] instead of '*orationes*,' because the Greek has '*proseuchas*' not '*euchas*,' is, I think, a matter of unskillful translation, for it is widely known that '*orationes*' are called '*proseuchas*' in Greek. Certainly there is a difference between praying and adoring. However, the Greek does not use that word but another in: 'The Lord thy God shalt thou adore,'⁴⁵ and 'I will adore toward thy holy temple,'⁴⁶ and similar passages.

According to the texts, where our translators have '*interpellationes*' [intercessions], yours, I believe, have '*postulationes*' [requests]. The Greek word is '*enteuxeis*' [intercessions] and this one word the translators have tried to render in these two ways, since some have '*postulationes*' and other '*interpellationes*.' Of course, you notice and you know that there is a difference between '*interpellare*' and '*postulare*.' We are in the habit of saying: 'They petition with an intercession,' but 'they intercede with a petition.' However, when a word is used with an allied meaning, and the very similarity of meaning wins

45 Matt. 4.10.

46 Ps. 5.8. The Greek for adore is *proskuneo*, bow down.

understanding for it, we are not to disgrace it with a black mark.⁴⁷ We read of the Lord Jesus Christ that 'He makes intercession for us.'⁴⁸ Could He possibly intercede without asking something for us? On the contrary, the word intercession is used because He petitions for us. This is plainly said of Him in another place: 'And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the just: he is the propitiation for our sins.'⁴⁹ It may be that your texts have 'petition for us,' instead of 'intercede for us,' in that passage about the Lord Jesus; however, in Greek, the word which is here translated 'intercessions,' and which you wrote as 'petitions,' is the same as the word in that other passage, where it is written: 'He makes intercession for us.'

Since, then, he who pleads prays and he who prays pleads, while he that makes intercession with God does so for this end, that he may plead and pray, what does the Apostle mean by using these terms so that we cannot miss the difference of meaning? When a word is taken in a general sense, and with due regard for common usage of speech, it comes to one and the same thing whether you say *precatio*, *oratio*, *interpellatio* or *postulatio*; but if some individual meaning is to be drawn from these separately, it is difficult to achieve this with exactness. Naturally, there is much to be said about it which cannot be gainsaid.

I prefer to understand by these words what the entire, or almost the entire, Church observes: that we take as supplications [*precationes*] those prayers which are said in celebrating the Mysteries, before we begin to consecrate what lies on the table of the Lord; prayers [*orationes*] are said when it is blessed and sanctified and broken for distribution; and the whole Church, for the most part, closes this complete

47 *Nōta censoria*, the colored marks used by Roman censors to strike voters from the lists.

48 Rom. 8.34.

49 1 John 1.2.

petition with the Lord's Prayer. The original Greek word helps us to understand this distinction: the Scripture seldom uses the word *euchē* in the sense of *oratio*, but generally and much more frequently *euchē* means *votum* [vow, offering, wish]; whereas *proseuchē*, the word used in the passage we are treating, is always rendered by *oratio*. As I said above, some unskillful translators, looking at *proseuchē* as a derivative, have insisted on rendering it not *oratio* but *adoratio*, which, however, in Greek is *proskunēsis*. It is because *euchē* is sometimes used for *oratio* that they think *proseuchē* ought to be *adoratio*. But, as I said, if it is more usual for *euchē* to mean *votum* in Scripture, if we take the word 'prayer' in its general sense, what we say at the offering of what is vowed is more properly called prayer, that is, *proseuchē*. Now, all the things which are offered to God are vowed, especially the oblation at the holy altar, for in this Sacrament we show forth that supreme offering of ours, by which we vow to abide in Christ, even to the union of the Body of Christ. The outward sign of this is that 'we, being many, are one bread, one body.'⁵⁰ Consequently, I think that at this Consecration and this preparation for Communion the Apostle fittingly wishes that *proseuchas*, that is, prayers, should be made, or, as some have unskillfully rendered it, adoration, that is, what takes place at the offering, although this is more commonly expressed in Scripture by *euchē*. Intercessions [*interpellationes*], however, or, as your texts have it, requests [*postulationes*], are offered while the blessing is being given to the people, for at that time, by the laying on of hands, the bishops, as intercessors, offer the members of their flock to the most merciful Power. When this is completed and all have received the holy Sacrament, the whole is ended by thanksgiving, and this last is the very term called to our notice by the Apostle.

50 1 Cor. 10.17.

My very special reason for saying all this was that after I had briefly defined and interpreted these terms, no one should think of overlooking the passage which follows: 'for all men, for kings and those who are in high station, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all piety and charity,'⁵¹ and that no one should imagine, by a common frailty of the human mind, that these⁵² are not also to be made for those at whose hands the Church suffers persecution, since the members of Christ are to be gathered from every class of men. Hence he continues and says: 'For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth.' And that no one might say that there can be a way of salvation in a good manner of life and in the worship of the one almighty God, without partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, he says: 'For there is one God and one mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus,'⁵³ to make clear that what he had said above: 'He will have all men to be saved' is to be realized only through a mediator who would not be God, as the Word is always God, but the man Christ Jesus, since 'the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.'⁵⁴

Do not be disturbed, then, by what the same Apostle says about the Jews: 'As concerning the gospel, indeed, they are enemies for your sake, but as touching the elect, they are dear for the sake of the fathers.'⁵⁵ Indeed, that 'depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God,' those 'incomprehensible judgments and unsearchable ways' of His⁵⁶ strike deep admiration into faithful hearts which do not doubt that from the depths of His wisdom, 'reaching from

51 Cf. 1 Tim. 2.1.2.

52 I.e., supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings.

53 1 Tim. 2.3,4.

54 John 1.14.

55 Rom. 11.28.

56 Rom. 11.33.

end to end mightily, and ordering all things sweetly,⁵⁷ there should be a reason why He is pleased to allow men to be born, to increase and multiply, whom He did not make wicked, but who He foreknew would be wicked. His design is deeply hidden, but by making a good use of the wicked for the benefit of the good, He exalts the omnipotence of His goodness, since, as they make a bad use of His good works, so His wisdom makes a good use of their evil works.

The Apostle thus praises the depth of this mystery: 'I would not have you ignorant, brethren, of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own conceits, that blindness in part hath happened in Israel until the fullness of the gentiles should come in. And so all Israel should be saved.'⁵⁸ He said 'in part,' because not all of them were blind; there were some among them who recognized Christ. But the fullness of the Gentiles comes in among those who have been called according to the plan. And so all Israel shall be saved because of the Jews and of the Gentiles who have been called according to the plan, and there arises a truer Israel of which the same Apostle says: 'and upon the Israel of God,'⁵⁹ but he calls those others Israel according to the flesh: 'Behold,' he says, 'Israel according to the flesh.'⁶⁰ Then he inserts the testimony of the Prophet: 'There shall come out of Sion he that shall deliver and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. And this is to them my covenant, when I shall take away their sins'⁶¹—not, indeed, from all the Jews, but from the elect.

This is the setting for the passage you posed for explanation: 'As concerning the Gospel, indeed, they are enemies for your sake.' Now, the price of our redemption is

57 Wisd. 8.1.

58 Rom. 11.25,26.

59 Gal. 6.16.

60 1 Cor. 10.18.

61 Rom. 11.26,27.

the Blood of Christ, who could manifestly not be killed except by His enemies. Here is the use of wicked men for the benefit of the good. In what comes next: 'But as touching the elect, they are dear for the sake of the fathers,' he shows that it is not the enemies but the elect who are dear. It is usual in the Scripture to speak of a part as of the whole, as, for example, he praises the Corinthians in the first part of his Epistle, as if all of them were like the special ones who deserved praise, but later, in other passages of the same Epistle, he blames them as if all deserved blame, whereas only certain ones deserved it. This manner of speech on the part of the divine Scriptures will be found scattered liberally throughout the whole collection of its writings by anyone who searches carefully, and it solves many points which seem to be contradictory. He says that some are enemies and some beloved, but, because they were of the same people, he seems to say that they are all the same. And even of those enemies who crucified the Lord, several were converted and stood forth as elect, but they became elect only when they were converted, counting that as the beginning of their salvation, but from the point of view of the foreknowledge of God they were not elect only at that time, but before the foundation of the world, as the same Apostle says that 'He chose us before the foundation of the world.'⁶² Therefore, there are two ways in which those enemies were loved: either because both were included in one people, or because some of them, who had raged as enemies even to the shedding of Christ's Blood, became beloved according to the election which was hidden in the foreknowledge of God. He added to this: 'for the sake of the fathers,' because what had been promised to the fathers was bound to be fulfilled, as he says toward the end of the Epistle to the Romans: 'For I say that Christ was minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the

⁶² Eph. 1.4.

promises made to the fathers; but that the gentiles are to glorify God for his mercy.⁶³ It is according to that mercy that he says: 'Enemies for your sake,' as well as what he said above: 'By their offense salvation is come to the gentiles.'⁶⁴

But when he had said: 'As touching the election . . . for the sake of the fathers,' he added: 'For the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance.'⁶⁵ You see, of course, that he means those who belong to the number of the predestined. In another place he says of these: 'We know that to them that love God, all things work together unto good, to such as according to his purpose are called.'⁶⁶ 'For many are called, but few chosen,'⁶⁷ but those who are chosen are themselves called according to His purpose, and in their case the foreknowledge can emphatically not be mistaken. 'For whom he foreknew he also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born amongst many brethren. And whom he predestinated, them also he called.' This calling is according to His purpose, that is, without repentance. 'But whom he called, them also he justified, and whom he justified them also he glorified. If God be for us, who is against us?'⁶⁸

Those who walk by faith 'that worketh by charity,'⁶⁹ though it should be for some time, if they do not persevere unto the end, are not included in that calling. Doubtless they could have been taken away, 'lest wickedness alter their understanding,'⁷⁰ if they had belonged to that predestination and calling which is according to His purpose and without repentance. And let no one presume to judge the hidden

63 Rom. 15.8,9.

64 Rom. 11.11.

65 Rom. 11.29.

66 Rom. 8.28.

67 Matt. 20.18.

68 Rom. 8.29,31.

69 Gal. 5.6.

70 Col. 2.18.

deeds of others so as to say: 'They were not taken away from this life before they left the faith because they did not walk faithfully in this life, and the Lord knew that this was in their hearts, although it seemed otherwise to men.' What is to be said of infants who receive the sacrament of Christian grace, as is usual at that age, and thus undoubtedly have a claim to eternal life and the kingdom of heaven if they die at once, whereas, if they are allowed to grow up, some even become apostates? Why is this, except that they are not included in that predestination and calling according to His purpose and without repentance? Why some are included and others are not can be for a hidden reason, but not for an unjust one. 'Is there injustice with God? God forbid!'⁷¹ For this also forms part of that depth of His judgments which the Apostle admires even as he fears. And his reason for calling them judgments is to prevent anyone from thinking that such things happen through the injustice or the imprudence of the doer, or accidentally or through the chance passing of any part of the centuries which have been so disposed by the great wisdom of God.

Coming now to the Epistle to the Colossians where it is written: 'Let no man seduce you willing in humility,'⁷² and the rest which follows, as far as you said it was obscure to you, I do not myself find it as yet clear of fog. How I wish you could have asked me that in a personal conversation! In that feeling for words, which it seems to me that I have, there is implied a certain pronouncement to be made by the expression of the face and the tone of voice, which cannot be expressed by letters so as to be even partially understood, and which thereupon becomes more obscure because, I think, it is not properly expressed. As to the words: 'Touch

⁷¹ Rom. 9.14.

⁷² Col. 2.18.

not, taste not, handle not,'⁷³ if they are considered as a commandment of the Apostle forbidding us to touch, taste, or handle something or other, it is just the opposite, if I am not deluded by the obscurity of the passage. Surely he used those words in mockery of those by whom he did not want his followers to be deceived and led astray. They were the ones who made a distinction of foods according to the worship of angels⁷⁴ and issued decrees for this life, saying: 'Touch not, taste not, handle not,' although 'all things are clean to the clean,'⁷⁵ 'For every creature of God is good,'⁷⁶ as he assures us in another place.

Let us, then, look at the whole setting of that sentence, and we may thus grasp the Apostle's meaning, as far as we can, by examining his intention. He was afraid that those to whom he wrote those words were being led astray by the shadows of things and by the fair name of knowledge, that they were being turned away from the light of truth which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. He perceived that they should be put on guard against that preoccupation with vain and useless observances under the name of wisdom and knowledge, against the superstition of the Gentiles, especially of those who were called philosophers, and against Judaizing tendencies, for these shadows of things to come were to be rolled away since Christ their light had now come. Therefore, when he reminded them and wrote to them: 'How great care he had for them, and for those who were at Laodicea, and whosoever had not seen his face in the flesh, that their hearts might be comforted, being joined in charity, unto all the riches of fulness of understanding unto the knowledge of the mystery of God, which is Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures

⁷³ Col. 2.21.

⁷⁴ I.e., they worshiped angels as divinities and accepted the Jewish view of unclean foods.

⁷⁵ Tit. 1.15.

⁷⁶ 1 Tim. 4.4.

of wisdom and knowledge, I say this,' he said, 'that no man may deceive you by plausible speech.'⁷⁷ Because they were attracted by love of truth, he feared that they might be deceived by a pretense of truth. Therefore he pointed out in Christ what they held most dear, namely, the treasure of wisdom and knowledge, for it was under the name and by the promise of this that they could have been led into error.

'For though I be absent in body,' he said, 'yet in spirit I am with you, rejoicing and beholding your order and what is lacking to your faith.' He feared for them because he saw what was still lacking to them. 'As therefore you have received Jesus Christ our Lord,' he says, 'walk ye in him, rooted and built up in him, and confirmed in the faith, as also you have learned, abounding in that thanksgiving.'⁷⁸ He wishes them to be nourished by faith that they may become capable of sharing in the treasures of wisdom and knowledge which are hidden in Christ, that they may not be taken in by plausible speech before they have become strong, and so stray away from the path of truth. Then, revealing more openly what he fears for them, he says: 'Beware lest any man cheat you by philosophy and vain deceit, according to the tradition of man, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ, for in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead corporally.' He says 'corporally' because they were being deceived by something shadowy—an adapted use of the word, as the noun 'shadow' is certainly not a literal term in these matters, but is transferred by a form of comparison. 'And you are filled in him,' he says, 'who is the head of all principality and power.'⁷⁹ By the principalities and powers the superstition of the Gentiles or the philosophers were leading them astray, preaching that theology which they

⁷⁷ Cf. Col. 2.1-4.

⁷⁸ Col. 2.5-7.

⁷⁹ Col. 2.8,10.

call 'according to the elements of this world.' But he wished them to understand that the head of all and the beginning of all is Christ, as He Himself, when asked 'Who art thou?' answered: 'The beginning who also speak unto you,' for 'all things were made by him and without him nothing was made.'⁸⁰ He wishes them to be marvellous despisers of these marvels when He shows, by speaking of its head, that they have become a body: 'And you are filled in him, who is the head of all principality and power.'

Following this, lest they be led astray by the shadows of Judaism, he adds: 'In whom also you are circumcised with circumcision not made by hand in despoiling of the body of the flesh'—or, as some have it: 'despoiling the body of the flesh of sin'—'in the circumcision of Christ, buried with him in baptism, in whom also you are risen again by the faith of the operation of God who hath raised him up from the dead.'⁸¹ See how he shows two things: in what manner they are this body of Christ, which should despise those other things, cleaving to their Head, the great Mediator of God and men, Christ Jesus,⁸² and that they need no lying and feeble intermediary by whom they may cleave to God. 'And you,' he says, 'when you were dead in your sins, and the uncircumcision of your flesh'—he calls it uncircumcision which is signified by the foreskin, that is, carnal sins, of which we are to be despoiled—'he hath quickened together with him, forgiving you all offenses, blotting out the handwriting of the decree that was against us, which was contrary to us'—because the Law made them guilty when it had entered in that sin might abound—'taking it from our midst and fastening it to the cross, stripping himself of the flesh, he hath confidently exposed the principalities and powers,

⁸⁰ John 8.25; 1.3.

⁸¹ Col. 2.11,12.

⁸² 1 Tim. 2.5.

⁸³ Col. 2.13-15.

triumphing over them in himself.'⁸³ Certainly it was not the good, but the wicked principalities and the wicked powers, namely the diabolical and demoniac ones, which He exposed; that is, He made an example of them, so that by stripping Himself of the flesh He might show that His followers were to be stripped of the carnal vices through which these evil powers lorded it over them.

Now, note carefully what conclusion he draws; this is what we have been leading up to by recalling all these details. 'Let no one then,' he says, 'judge you in meat,' as if he had said all the foregoing because they were being led by observances of this kind away from the truth by which they had been made free, as it is said in the Gospel: 'and the truth shall make you free,'⁸⁴ that is, shall make free men of you. 'Therefore,' he says, 'let no man judge you in meat or in drink or in respect of a festival day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come.' This is on account of Judaism. Then he follows with the superstitions of the Gentiles: 'But the body is Christ's,' he says, 'let no man seduce you.' It is shameful, he says, and altogether improper and foreign to the nobility of your liberty that, being the body of Christ, you should be seduced by shadows and should seem to be convicted of sin by failing in these observances. Therefore, 'Let no man seduce you willing in humility,'⁸⁵ of heart. If this were expressed by a Greek word, it would sound familiar even in the popular Latin usage. Thus, we generally say of one who apes the rich that he is *thelodives*, and whoever apes wisdom is called *thelosapiens*, and other words of the same sort; therefore, *thelohumilis*, which is more fully written *thelon humilis*, that is, wanting to be humble, putting on humility, which is understood as wishing to seem humble, aping humility. This is effected by such observances

⁸⁴ John 8.32.

⁸⁵ Col. 2.16-18.

as those wherein the heart of men is made humble as if by religion. But he added 'and the worship of angels,' or, as your texts have it, 'the religion of angels,' which in Greek is called *threskeía*, meaning by angels the principalities who were set in charge of the elements of this world, whom they thought to worship by these observances.

Therefore, since you are the body of Christ, let no man overcome you wishing to seem humble of heart in the worship of angels, 'walking in the things which he hath not seen,' or, as some texts have it, 'walking in the things which he hath seen.' He wanted to say either 'walking in the things which he hath not seen,' because men perform those acts under the influence of suspicions and rumors, not because they see that there is an obligation of doing them, or, obviously, 'walking in the things which he hath seen,' thinking that these observances are great because he has seen them done by men whose authority he respects, though they give no reason for their acts, and thus he is great in his own eyes because he has happened to witness the secrets of some forms of worship. But the fuller meaning is: 'Walking in the things which he hath not seen, in vain puffed up by the sense of his flesh.' It is remarkable how he says here of a man that he is in vain puffed up by the sense of his flesh, whom he referred to above as 'would-be humble' [*thelohumilis*], for it happens in a surprising way that the mind of man is puffed up more by false humility than it would be by open pride. 'And not holding the head,' he says—and by this he wishes us to understand Christ—'from which the whole body by joints and bands being supplied with nourishment, and compacted, groweth unto the increase of God. If then you be dead with Christ from the elements of this world, why do you yet decree as living in this world?'⁸⁶

86 Col. 2.18-20.

To these words he attaches the utterances of those who are puffed up by the vanity of an affected humility, who make decrees concerning this world through these supposedly reasonable observances: 'Touch not, taste not, handle not.' Let us recall how we are to understand this, as we said above. He does not wish them to be judged by these observances which are expressed by 'Touch not, taste not, handle not. All which,' he says, 'are unto destruction by the very use.' He says that all these things tend rather to destruction when a man refrains from them through superstition, thus abusing them, which means that he does not use them 'according to the precepts and doctrines of men.'⁸⁷ This is clear, but what follows needs close examination: 'Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in observance and in humility of heart and trouble of body,'—or, as others translate it: 'not sparing the body—not in any honor to the filling of the flesh.'⁸⁷ Why, you ask, does he say that these things have a show of wisdom when he censures them so severely?

I will tell you what you yourself can note in the Scriptures, that wisdom is often treated as if it dwelt in this world, and is then called more explicitly the wisdom of this world. Do not be troubled that the writer did not here add 'of this world,' for in another place where he says: 'Where is the wise? where is the scribe?'⁸⁸ he does not add 'of this world,' so as to say: 'Where is the wise of this world?' yet this is understood. So also of that 'show of wisdom,' for nothing is said by them in superstitious observances of this nature which does not seemingly display a certain show of wisdom according to the elements of this world and the phenomena of nature. Then, too, when he says: 'Beware lest any man cheat you by philosophy,' he does not say 'of this world,' for what is philosophy in Latin but love of wisdom? Therefore, he says:

⁸⁷ Cf. Col. 2.21-23.

⁸⁸ 1 Cor. 1.20.

'those things have indeed a certain show of wisdom'—that is, some such show is made by them according to the elements of this world and the principalities and powers—'in observance and humility of heart'—for they so act that the heart is humbled by the vice of superstition—'not sparing the body,'—while it is cheated of the foods from which it is obliged to abstain—'not in any honor to the filling of the flesh,' not because it is more honorable for the flesh to be filled with one food rather than another, since it is not under the necessity of being refreshed and nourished by a special food except in certain forms of ill health.

Your inquiry about the Gospel is one that commonly disturbs many: how it happened after the Resurrection that the Lord, although He rose in the same body, was both recognized and not recognized by persons of both sexes who had known Him. The first question usually raised is whether some effect was produced in His body or in their eyes, which prevented recognition of Him. When we read: 'Their eyes were held that they should not know him,'⁸⁹ it seems as if some impediment to recognition had been effected in the eyes of those who beheld Him; and when it is plainly said elsewhere: 'He appeared to them in another shape,'⁹⁰—obviously in His own body with another appearance—some effect was produced which acted as an impediment to prevent them, that is, their eyes were subjected to a delay in recognition. But, since there are two factors in a body by which its appearance is recognized—features and coloring—I am surprised that before the Resurrection, when He was so transfigured on the Mount that His face 'shone as the sun,'⁹¹ no one was troubled at His being able to transform the color of His body into that perfection of brilliance and light, but

89 Luke 24.16.

90 Mark 16.12.

91 Matt. 17.1,2; Mark 9.1,2.

after His Resurrection it caused so much trouble that He changed His features so as not to be recognized, yet with the same effortless power resumed His original coloring then and His original features after the Resurrection. Those three disciples, before whose eyes He was transfigured on the Mount, would not have recognized Him if He had come to them in that guise from somewhere else, but because they were with Him they most certainly recalled His looks. Yet, He rose in the same body. What has that to do with it? Assuredly, it was the same body in which He was transfigured on the Mount, and His body in manhood was the same as that in which He was born, yet, if anyone who had known Him only in infancy had suddenly seen Him as a man, he would certainly not have recognized Him. Cannot the power of God make a sudden change in features such as a man's age effects by the lapse of years?

Concerning the words He said to Mary: 'Do not touch me, for I am not yet ascended to my Father,'⁹² you know that my understanding of them is no different from yours. He wished to signify that a spiritual touch, that is, the approach of faith, seeks Him out where He is believed to be on high with the Father. And no one should doubt that His being recognized in the breaking of bread⁹³ is the Sacrament which brings us together in recognizing Him.

On the words of Simeon, where he says to the Virgin Mother of the Lord: 'And thy own soul a sword shall pierce,'⁹⁴ I have set forth in another letter what I think, and I sent you a copy some time since, which you saw among other things. As to his adding: 'That out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed,' I think it is to be taken in the sense that by the Passion of the Lord both the plots of the Jews and the weakness of the

⁹² John 20.17.

⁹³ Luke 24.30,31.

⁹⁴ Luke 2.35.

disciples were made manifest. It is possible to believe that tribulation is signified by the word 'sword,' that tribulation through which her mother's heart was wounded by the feeling of grief. That sword was in the lips of the persecutors, of which it says in the psalm: 'And a sword is in their lips.'⁹⁵ They were the 'sons of men whose teeth are weapons and arrows and their tongue a sharp sword.'⁹⁶ The iron which pierced the soul of Joseph⁹⁷ seems to me to be an expression of bitter tribulation; thus, it is plainly said: 'The iron pierced his soul until his word came,' that is, he remained that long in bitter tribulation until his prediction was fulfilled. From then on he was held in great esteem and was free from tribulation. But, lest human wisdom should receive the credit because his word came, that is, what he foretold came to pass, in its own way the holy Scripture gives the glory of it to God, and adds at once: 'The word of the Lord inflamed him.'⁹⁸

To the best of my ability I have answered your questions, helped on by your prayers and by the arguments which you sent. For you argue by questioning, you put searching questions, and you teach by your humility. It is profitable that many opinions should be worked out on the obscure passages of the divine Scriptures; this is willed by God as a motive for our industry, and though some have different views, yet all agree in faith and sound doctrine. You will pardon my pen for being in such a hurry that I am now running to meet the designated bearer on the ship. In this letter I greet again our son Paulinus,⁹⁹ most sweet in the charity of Christ, and I urge him briefly to make haste to give such

⁹⁵ Ps. 58.8.

⁹⁶ Ps. 56.5.

⁹⁷ Gen. 40; 41.

⁹⁸ Ps. 104.18,19.

⁹⁹ Not the recipient of this letter, but evidently a recent arrival among the 'brethren' of Bishop Paulinus.

thanks as he can to the mercy of the Lord, who, knowing how to give help in trouble, has brought him, after a most violent storm, to the harbor to which you have traveled over a calmer sea—though you put no trust in the sea's calmness—and who has given you to him to shelter and nourish in his beginnings. Let all his bones say: 'Lord who is like to thee?'¹⁰⁰ He will draw no richer fruit from reading or hearing my teachings and discussions or my ardent exhortations than by looking upon your manner of life. My fellow servants who are with me repeat their greeting to your holy and most upright Benignity. Our fellow deacon, Peregrinus, has not returned to Hippo since he left with our holy brother Urban,¹⁰¹ when he went to assume the burden of his episcopate; however, we know from their letters and from popular report that they are well, in the name of the Lord. With brotherly affection we greet our fellow priest, Paulinus, and all who enjoy your presence in the Lord.

150. *Augustine gives greeting to the ladies, Proba¹ and Juliana, his noble, distinguished and deservedly honored daughters (413)*

You have filled our heart with joy, adding to our pleasure by your affection and to our gratification by your promptness. You have given us the news that a member of your family has become a consecrated virgin; you have thereby forestalled the swiftest flight of ever-busy rumor, which has the first word everywhere, and by the surer and more trustworthy message of your letter you have given us cause to exult in the certainty

100 Ps. 34.10.

101 Bishop of Sicca. Peregrinus also became a bishop of an unnamed see.

1 Cf. Letters 130, 131. She was the wife of Sextus Anicius Probus, formerly consul and praetorian prefect. Juliana was married to her son, Olybrius; Demetrias, the consecrated virgin, was their daughter.

of this best of blessings before we had time to doubt of it on hearsay. Who can express in words, who can describe with adequate praise, how incomparably more glorious and rewarding it is for Christ to have virgin spouses of your blood than for the world to have manly consuls? If it is a great and splendid thing to inscribe your famous name on the scrolls of time, how much greater and more splendid is it to rise above earthly fame by purity of heart and body! Therefore, let this maiden, noble by birth, more noble by sanctity, find greater joy in being destined, through this divine union, to an especially high rank in heaven than she would have if she were to become the foundress of an illustrious line through an earthly marriage. Undoubtedly, the daughter of the Anicii² made a higher choice when she elected to magnify so illustrious a family by refusing to marry rather than to enlarge it by bearing children, and to imitate here in the flesh the life of angels rather than of the body to increase still more the number of mortals. It is a richer and more fruitful happiness not to become big with child but to grow great in mind; not to store milk in the breast but ardor in the heart; not to bring forth earth through travail but heaven through prayer. Ladies, most worthy of honor, deservedly illustrious and distinguished daughters, may you enjoy in her what you gave up in order that she might be born of you; may she persevere to the end, clinging to her espousals which have no end. May many servants imitate their mistress, many base-born follow this noble maiden, many perilously placed in high estate rise higher by imitating her lowliness; may virgins who envy the lofty rank of the Anicii choose instead its holiness! By no amount of wishing could they attain the one, but, if they earnestly desire the other, they will soon have it. May the right hand of the Most High keep you safe and happy, ladies

2 A patrician family dating from the time of the Roman Republic, and numbering many famous members.

most worthy of honor, distinguished daughters. In the love of the Lord, and with the respect due to your merits, we send greetings to the children of your Holiness³ and in particular to your singularly holy daughter. We have received with gratitude the memento⁴ of her taking the veil.

151. Augustine gives greeting in the Lord to Caecilian¹ deservedly distinguished lord, son most worthy of my tribute of honor (c. 413)

The complaint you make in your letter of my attitude toward you is the more gratifying to me as a sign of your love. If, then, I should try to excuse my silence, what else shall I try to do but to show that you had no valid reason to be angry with me? And as I love most in you that you were so good as to be hurt by my reticence—something I had thought of no importance in the midst of your anxieties—I shall be false to my own case if I hasten to excuse myself. For, if you should not have been hurt at my not writing to you, it would mean that you consider me of no account, because you do not care whether I speak or keep silence. On the other hand, as you took it hard that I did keep silence, your displeasure is my distinction. Therefore, my regret at having failed you is outweighed by my joy at your having missed my words. That an old friend, a man of such worth and importance—something for you to ignore, but for me to acknowledge—stationed among strangers, loaded down with public duties, should deign to reproach me with failing to

³ While this title was not reserved to the Pope at this time, it is unusual to find it applied to a woman.

⁴ *Apophoreta*, trinkets usually bestowed on guests at Roman banquets. Cf. Petronius, *Cena Trimalchionis* 31.

¹ Prefect of the Province of Africa; cf. Letter 86.

offer you the comfort of my words is a matter of honor to me, not of grief. Pardon me, therefore, for my thanks that you deem me not unworthy of your displeasure at my silence. I now take the word of your Benignity—a quality in which you excel above measure—that in the midst of your many great tasks, not personal but public, that is, concerned with the common welfare, it is possible for my letters not only not to be burdensome, or rather, it is impossible for them to be burdensome, but that they can even be agreeable.

When I learned that a letter of the holy Pope Innocent,² so worthy of veneration for his singular merits, had been sent to me by the brethren, and when it was reported by reliable sources that it had been given to me through your Excellency, I had not supposed that any page of yours had been delivered with it, because as you were absorbed in weightier matters you would not have cared to be tied down to the task of writing and answering. It certainly seemed natural to me, as you had condescended to bring the holy writings of so holy a man that I should receive them with some addition of yours. For this reason I decided not to load down your mind with my letters, unless I were obliged to do someone the favor of a recommendation, in a case where I could not refuse the service of an introduction, which it is our usual custom to grant to all—a public duty sometimes inconvenient but not for that reason to be shirked. That is what I did. I recommended a friend of mine to your Benignity, and I have received his answer thanking me, as I also thank you.

If I had harbored any harsh thought against you, especially in that matter³ with which your letter was permeated, although it was not explicitly put, God forbid that I should

² Innocent I (402-417).

³ The murder of Marcellinus who presided over the Conference of Carthage. Cf. Letters 128, 129, 133, 138, 139.

write any such thing to you when I was asking a favor either for myself or for someone else. I should either have held my peace, biding my time until I had a personal interview with you, or, if I had thought it a fit subject to be treated in a letter, I would rather have taken up that point and I would have dealt with it in such a way that you could scarcely have borne my grief. For, after his⁴ wicked and cruel perfidy, when through the agency of your anxious care which I shared I had vainly and vehemently insisted that he should not pierce our heart with that sorrow nor murder his own conscience by such a monstrous crime, I left Carthage at once, keeping my departure secret, lest the many important persons who feared the power of his sword even inside the Church might hold me back by their violent tears and lamentations, with the idea that my presence would be some protection to them. Although I had not been able to plead adequately for his⁵ life, I might have been forced to petition for their security, although, in fact, the walls of the church⁶ were sufficient to protect their personal safety. On my side I was cruelly straitened because he⁷ could not tolerate me, as he was obliged to do, and in addition I was forced to do what it was not fitting for me to do. I was deeply grieved at the lot of my venerable fellow bishop,⁸ pastor of so important a church, of whom it was said that it was his duty, after the abominable treachery of such a man was revealed, to abase himself in order to win pardon for others. I admit it: I lacked strength of heart to bear such trouble, so I left.

4 Marinus, Count of Africa, who, in collusion with the Donatists, arrested Marcellinus and his brother Apringius under the false pretense that they had sided with Heracian in his revolt against Honorius. It is noteworthy that Augustine carefully refrains from mentioning names in this letter, but they are inserted where needed for clearness.

5 Marcellinus.

6 The right of sanctuary was fully recognized in the ancient world.

7 Count Marinus.

8 Archbishop Aurelius.

This would also be a reason for my silence toward you, as it was of my departure, if I had believed that you had worked on him to avenge your injuries so basely. Those who believe that do not know how and how often and to what effect you have spoken with us, when with anxious care we tried to bring it about that the more intimate his contacts with you, the more frequent your visits to him, the more numerous your private talks with him, the more regard he might have for your judgment, so as not to inflict such destruction on those who were said to be your enemies, thereby letting it be thought that you were implicated in that course of conduct. I do not believe this, and neither do these brethren of mine who both heard at the interview and saw at the hearing, as well as in every gesture, the signs of your kindness of heart. But I beg of you, pardon those who do believe it, for they are men, and there are so many windings and dark places in the minds of men that, although all the mistrustful are deservedly blamed, they even think they ought to be praised for being cautious. Their cases were waiting. From one of those whom he had suddenly ordered to be arrested we learned that you had suffered a grievous wrong. It is said that his brother,⁹ also, in whom the persecutor especially injured the Church, answered you somewhat harshly, as if he were defending his brother. Both were thought to be objects of suspicion to you. They were summoned after they had gone away, and, while you remained there and were reported to be conferring with him secretly, they were suddenly ordered to be held. Men were saying that your friendship was not new but of long standing. Your being so close to him and the continued conversations between you two alone strengthened that rumor. His power was great at that time; it made false representations easy. It was not much trouble to secure an agent who, in exchange for a guarantee of immunity, would say what he

9 Apringius, proconsul of Africa.

was ordered to say. All these practices were regularly current at that time, so that by a single witness almost anyone could be rushed out of life on a seemingly damaging and plausible charge with no danger to the ruling authority.

Meantime, as there was a report that they might be rescued by a group from the Church, we were being made sport of by false promises, to the effect that a bishop would be sent to court on their behalf, not only with his consent but even with his active support, and this further promise was confided to episcopal ears that, until some defense was undertaken for them, there would be no investigation into their case. Finally, the day before they were struck down, your Excellency came to us. You gave us such hope as you had never before given, that he might possibly give them over to you to take care of, as you had spoken to him seriously and wisely; all of which, discussed with you so intimately and secretly, does not do you honor, but adds to your responsibility and has this effect, that no one would doubt that the plot for their death was shared and contrived between you, if that death were to follow upon all these happenings. After informing us of what you had said, you jumped up in the midst of your story and, stretching out your hands toward the place where the mysteries of the faithful are celebrated, to our stupefaction, you swore so solemnly to having said such things that not only then, but even now, after such a revolting and unheard-of murder, when I recall all your gestures, I feel deeply abashed at believing any evil of you. You said that Marinus had been so deeply moved by your words that you strongly hoped he would give you their lives as a farewell gift.

I confess to your Charity that on the following day, after the abominable deed had been hatched from that plot, when we were suddenly informed that they had been taken out of prison and brought before his tribunal, we were upset, of course, but when I recalled what you had said to us the day

before, and what day was due to follow on this one—that it was the eve of the feast of blessed Cyprian¹⁰—I thought he had chosen that day to grant your request, and give joy to the whole Church of Christ, by having in mind to go up to the shrine of the great martyr more resplendent in the goodness of his act of mercy than in his power of life and death; when, behold, a messenger rushed in to us and, before we could ask what kind of hearing they had, we learned that they had been beheaded. The place, which was near, had been picked out; it was not a place set apart for public executions, but a pleasure spot of the city, and there is good reason to believe that he had ordered others to be executed there several days before, so that it would not be a hateful novelty for them to be killed by his orders, not only suddenly but even in a place so near, since it had been his plan thus to snatch them from under the eyes of the Church. He gave sufficient proof that he did not fear to inflict torture on that Mother whose intervention he did fear, namely, the holy Church, among whose faithful, baptized in her bosom, we knew that he was included. But, after the outcome of this monstrous undertaking, when he had gone to such lengths, using you without your knowledge to put us almost at ease, almost sure of their safety on the previous day, who of the usual run of men would have any doubt that we had been made sport of and their life had been taken by you, also? Therefore, as I said, good Sir, even if we do not believe this, pardon those who do believe.

However, it would be alien to my heart and life, such as they are, to intercede with you for anyone or to ask a favor of you for anyone if I believed that you had instigated this great wrong and had been a partner in this accursed cruelty. But I confess openly that if you continue to be intimate with him hereafter as you have been heretofore—pardon the free speech

¹⁰ September 16.

of my sorrow—you will force us to believe much of what we have not wanted to believe. It is natural for me not to believe this, as I do not believe the former rumors about you. By the unexpected success of his sudden act of power, your friend has made no less an attack on your reputation than he has made on their life. In saying this I am not trying to kindle your hatred against him, forgetful of my own soul and profession, but I am summoning you to a more faithful charity. Whoever deals with the wicked so as to make them repeat their wickedness knows how to take counsel of his anger, for, as the wicked do harm by consent, so the virtuous do good by opposition. Indeed, he has pierced his own soul¹¹ more grievously and deeply with the very sword that so insolently slew them, and this he will be forced to know and feel after this life, if he does not amend his life by repentance and by availing himself of the patience of God. By a profound judgment of God it has often been permitted that the good be deprived of the present life by the wicked, lest such suffering be considered itself an evil. What harm is it for beings destined to die to lose the life of the flesh? And what do those who fear death achieve except to die a little later? Whatever misfortune befalls the dying comes from their life, not their death, for, if at death their souls have been such as to be succored by Christian grace, then, indeed, their death is not the sunset of a good life, but the dawn of a better.

The conduct of the older brother appeared to be more conformable to this world than to Christ, although he did amend his youthful and previously worldly life in no small measure by taking a wife. It is probable, however, that the merciful God showed him mercy by willing him to be a sharer in his brother's death, for this latter lived the Christian life devoutly and wholeheartedly. This reputation preceded him that he might appear in this light in defense of the Church;¹¹

11 At the Conference of Carthage in 411.

it followed him after he had come. What uprightness of character was his, what fidelity in friendship, zeal for learning, sincerity of devotion, purity in his married life, restraint in his judgment, patience toward his enemies, courtesy toward his friends, humility toward those consecrated to God, charity toward all, readiness to grant favors, moderation in asking them, love in his good deeds, sorrow for his sins! What great glory of honor, what resplendent grace, what conscientiousness in his piety, what compassion in helping, what goodness in pardoning, what truthfulness in pleading! How modestly he spoke of what it is good to know, how carefully he looked into what can not be usefully ignored! What contempt he had for things of this life, what hope and longing for eternal goods! The bond of marriage prevented him from leaving all worldly concerns and enrolling himself in the army of Christ,¹² for he was already bound before he began to sigh for the better life, when it was no longer allowable for him to break those bonds, however much they held him to a lower state.

One day, after they had both been imprisoned, his brother said to him: 'I suffer these misfortunes as a due penalty for my sins, but you, whose life we have known as so constantly and fervently Christian, what evil deserving has brought you to such straits?' He replied: 'Have you so low an esteem of the bounty divinely bestowed on me—if, indeed, this testimony of yours on my life is true—as to think that what I suffer, even if I should suffer to the shedding of my blood, is not for the punishment of my sins so that they may not be held against me at the judgment to come?' Perhaps someone might think from this that he was conscious of some secret sins of impurity. I will tell, therefore, what the Lord God, to my great consolation, willed me to learn openly from his mouth. I had an interview alone with him on this subject while he was being held under guard, feeling anxious, because of human frailty,

12 The religious life of celibacy.

lest there be something in his life that might need greater and more public penance in order to reconcile him with God. At my suspicion, false as it was, he blushed—he was a man of extraordinary modesty—but he received my warning very gratefully, smiling gravely and respectfully, and taking my right hand in both of his, he said: ‘I swear by the mysteries which are offered by this hand that I have never had sexual intercourse outside my marriage, either before or after it.’

What loss did death bring him which was not, rather, a great gain, when with these good works he went to meet Christ, without whom no good is profitably possessed? I should not recall these facts to you if I believed you would be offended by praise of him, but, as I do not believe it, neither do I believe that other rumor that his death could not have occurred without your—I do not say instigation—but at least consent and desire. Therefore, the more blameless you are, the more sincerely you share our judgment that Marinus dealt a more cruel blow to his own soul than he did to the body of Marcellinus, when, in despite of us, in despite of his own promises, in despite of such numerous and such weighty petitions and warnings from you, in despite of the Church, and, in the Church, of Christ Himself, he attained the goal of his false plot by the death of a hero. Is there any comparison between the rank of the one and the prison of the other, when the one acted like a madman in his high position the other rejoiced in his chains? The conscience of a wicked man, with its dread and penal shadows, outweighs not only all prisons, but even all hell. What hurt did it do you so long as it did not destroy your reputation? However, your reputation is intact both with those who know you better than we do and with us who saw the care you took in concert with us to prevent so monstrous a crime from being committed, care which was expressed with such feeling that we seemed to look with our very eyes into the invisible workings of your

heart. Therefore, whatever injury he did he did to himself. He stabbed his own soul, his own life, his own conscience; finally, he ravaged his very reputation, a treasure which the most degraded of men covet. The more he is hated by all good men, the more he has tried to please the wicked, or has taken pleasure in having pleased them.

What greater proof can there be that he did not have the obligation which he pretended to have, than that he did not meet the approval of the very one¹³ whose command he dared to allege as an excuse for an evil deed, which he committed as if innocent, under the cloak of another's authority? Let the holy deacon Quintianus relate to your Excellency—for he went as attendant to the bishop whom we sent to appeal for them—how it was not thought well to ask a pardon for them lest some stigma of the charge should thus be attached to them, but only a directive by which the jailer should be ordered to free them from all molestation. Although there may have been other reasons which we suspect but which there is no need to set down in writing,¹⁴ it was with a gratuitous and unnecessary cruelty that he caused such bitter grief to the Church, to whose bosom his brother, fearing death, had fled for refuge that he might find alive the adviser of so great a crime; whose help he himself sought when he had offended his patron and this help could not be refused. If you love this man, renounce him; if you do not wish him to suffer eternal punishment, tremble for him. This is what you must do to safeguard your own reputation as well as his life, for, whoever loves in him what God hates hates him as well as his own self.

Since this is the case, I do not believe it true of your Benignity that you were either the instigator of this great crime or a partner to it, or that you showed a malicious

¹³ Emperor Honorius, by whom Marinus was disavowed and disgraced.

¹⁴ The hatred of the Donatists because of the judgment rendered by Marcellinus at the Conference of Carthage was the real reason.

cruelty in deceiving us—far be this from your life and character! But I wish that your friendships may not be such as he wickedly boasts of, to his own destruction, thereby strengthening public suspicion; let them be such as bring a man to penance, great and real penance which is needed as a remedy for such terrible wounds. You will be his friend in proportion as you are an enemy to his evil deeds. I greatly desire to learn from your Excellency's answer where you were on the day when the deed was committed, how you received the news, what you did afterwards, whether you saw him, what you said to him, what you heard from him. I have not been able to get any news bearing on this matter from you since I left hastily on the following day.

I read in your letter that you are forced to believe that I left Carthage in order not to see you, and by these words you force me to disclose the reasons for my absence. One of them is that I am no longer able to bear the labor which has to be borne in that city, and, if I were to explain why, there is only one other thing to be said, that, in addition to my usual poor health, which is known to all who are acquainted with me, I suffer also from advancing age, an ailment common to humankind. The other reason is that I have decided, if the Lord wills, to spend on my work in the field of studies connected with sacred literature all the time left me from my duties which the Church urgently claims from me by reason of my obligation to that service. I think, if it pleases the mercy of God, that this work will be useful to posterity.

However, if you are seeking to hear the truth, there is one thing in you of which I thoroughly disapprove, and that is that a man of your age and of your life and uprightness should still wish to be a catechumen, as if it were not possible for the faithful to carry out the duties of public office more devotedly and faithfully in proportion as they are themselves more devoted and more faithful. What good do you ac-

comply in the midst of these great toils and troubles of yours unless you work for the common good? If you do not accomplish this, it would be better to spend your nights and days in sleep than to waste your time on public duties which do not promote the general welfare. Indeed, I do not doubt that your Excellency . . . ¹⁵

152. Macedonius¹ to the deservedly esteemed lord, his uniquely cherished father, Augustine (414)

I received the long-awaited letter of your Holiness through Boniface,² bishop of the holy law, whom I was the more delighted to welcome as he brought me my heart's desire—word of your Holiness and of your well-being, deservedly esteemed lord and uniquely cherished father. Therefore, he secured what he asked without delay. But, as the opportunity has arisen, I do not wish to remain without my pay for this same slight service in which I accommodated him at your request. The pay I crave to receive is one which will be a gain to me without loss to the payer, or, rather will be my gain to the glory of the bestower.

You say that it is part of your priestly office to intercede for condemned persons, and to be displeased if you do not succeed, as if you thereby failed to carry out that part of your duty. I have a serious doubt about this, whether it is part of religion. For if sin is so strictly forbidden by the Lord that no opportunity of repentance is granted after the first, how can we argue that any crime, of whatever sort, should be forgiven us, and how can we approve it by wishing it to go unpunished?

¹⁵ An extensive lacuna is here indicated by Goldbacher.

¹ Vicar of Africa, entrusted with the duty of enforcing imperial decrees against the Donatists.

² Cf. Letter 149 n. 3.

And if it is a fact that the one who approves a sin is no less involved in all the circumstances of a sin than the one who commits it, it is clear that we are implicated in a share of the guilt as often as we wish the one who is subject to the penalty to go unpunished. Besides, here is another point, which is even more serious. All sins seem to deserve forgiveness when the guilty person promises amendment, but human behavior has now come to this pass that men wish to have the punishment of their crime remitted and at the same time to keep the profit which they gained by their evil deeds. Your priestly office thinks that intercession should be made for these, also, although the fact that the same motive for the crime continues to be present gives no hope at all for them in the future. Whoever holds tenaciously to the object of his sin shows that he will commit the same again when opportunity allows.

This is my reason for consulting your Prudence: I earnestly desire to be freed of the doubt which weighs me down; do not imagine that I am consulting you for any other reason. This is what I have decided to do: to show gratitude to intercessors, especially those as highly esteemed as you are. Often, when I seem unwilling to do something on my own impulse, lest any relaxation of discipline should encourage others to commit crime, I long to give in to good intercessors, so that what I grant willingly may seem to be a concession to another's merit, while the severity of the verdict is preserved. May the eternal God keep your Holiness safe for a long time to come, esteemed lord and truly beloved father.

You promised me some writings of your Holiness,³ but I have not received any. I ask you to send them now with your answer to this letter, so that I may at least feed on your words, if it is not granted me meantime to see your Holiness.

³ The first three Books of the *City of God*.

153. *Augustine, bishop, servant of Christ and of his household, gives greeting in the Lord to his beloved son, Macedonius (414)*

When a man is as much burdened with public duties and as devoted to the interest of others and to the public welfare rather than his own, as you are—and I congratulate you—it is not right for us to deprive you of our conversation nor to delay you with a foreword. Here, then, is what you wanted to learn from me, or to discover whether I knew the answer. If you judged that it was a trifling or superfluous matter, you would see that there was no place for it among such great and such exigent cares. You ask me why we say that it is part of our priestly duty to intercede for condemned persons, and to be displeased if we do not succeed, as if we were failing to carry out that part of our duty. You then say that you have a serious doubt about this, whether it is part of religion. Thereupon, you add your reason for being disturbed and you say: 'If sin is so strictly forbidden by the Lord that no opportunity of repentance is granted after the first, how can we argue that any crime of whatever sort should be forgiven?' You press the point still more closely and you say that we approve an act by wishing it to go unpunished, and, if it is a fact that the one who approves of a sin is involved in all the circumstances of it no less than the one who commits it, it is clear that we are implicated in a share of the guilt as often as we wish the one who is subject to the penalty to go unpunished.

Anyone who did not know your gentleness and kindness would be affronted by these words. But we who know that you wrote this in order to raise the question, not to give an opinion, have no hesitation in answering these words at once

by other words of yours. As if you did not wish us to delay on this question, you either forestalled what we were going to say, or you advised us what we ought to say, and you said: 'Besides, here is another point, which is even more serious. All sins seem to deserve forgiveness when the guilty person promises amendment! Before I discuss that more serious point which follows in your letter, I shall take up this concession which you have made and use it to remove that obstacle which makes it seem possible for our intercession to be curtailed. So, then, as far as opportunity is granted, we intercede for all sins because 'all sins seem to deserve forgiveness when the guilty person promises amendment.' This is your sentiment and it is also ours.

We do not in any way approve the faults which we wish to see corrected, nor do we wish wrong-doing to go unpunished because we take pleasure in it; we pity the man while detesting the deed or crime, and the more the vice displeases us, the less do we want the culprit to die unrepentant. It is easy and simple to hate evil men because they are evil, but uncommon and dutiful to love them because they are men; thus, in one and the same person you disapprove the guilt and approve the nature, and you thereby hate the guilt with a more just reason because by it the nature which you love is defiled. Therefore, he who makes war on the crime in order to free the man is not involved in a share of the wrong-doing, but, rather, of human feeling. Moreover, there is no other place but this life for correcting morals; whatever anyone has sought out for himself in this life, the same will he have after it. Consequently, we are forced by our love for humankind to intercede for the guilty lest they end this life by punishment, only to find that punishment does not end with this life.

Do not doubt that this duty of ours is a part of religion

because God, 'with whom there is no iniquity,'¹ whose power is supreme, who not only sees what each one is but also foresees what he will be, who alone cannot err in His judgment because He cannot be deceived in His knowledge, nevertheless acts as the Gospel expresses it: 'He maketh his sun to rise upon the good and bad, and raineth upon the just and the unjust.' The Lord Christ, exhorting us to imitate His wonderful goodness, says: 'Love your enemies, do good to them that persecute you, that you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven, who maketh his sun to rise upon the good and bad and raineth upon the just and the unjust.'² Is there anyone who does not know that many abuse this divine clemency and kindness to their own destruction? The Apostle upbraids these and reproves them gravely, saying: 'And thinkest thou, O man, that judgest them that do such things, and dost the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despiseth thou the riches of his goodness and patience and longsuffering? Knowest thou not that the benignity of God leadeth thee to penance? But according to thy hardness and impenitent heart thou treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the just judgment of God who will render to every man according to his works.'³ Is the fact that some persist in their wickedness any proof that God does not persist in His patience, punishing very few sins in this world, lest we fail to believe in His divine providence and, saving many for the last judgment, to justify His future decree?

No, I do not think that heavenly Master commands us to love wickedness when He commands us to love our enemies, to do good to those who hate us and to pray for those who persecute us, although, without doubt, if we worship God

¹ 2 Paral. 19.7.

² Matt. 5.44,45.

³ Rom. 2.3-6.

devoutly, we can have no enemies and persecutors roused to bitter hatred against us except the wicked. Are we, then, to love the wicked? Are we to do good to the wicked? Are we to pray for the wicked? Just so. He who commands this is God, yet He does not for this include us in the ranks of the wicked, nor does He Himself join their ranks by sparing them and granting them life and health. His intention, as far as it is given to the good man to know it, is expressed by the Apostle when he says: 'Knowest thou not that the benignity of God leadeth thee to penance?' We wish to add that we do not spare or favor the sins of those for whom we intercede.

In the case of some whose sins are public, after they have been released from your severe sentence, we keep them from participation in the Sacrament of the altar so that, by repentance and by punishing themselves, they may be able to make atonement to Him whom they have flouted by their sin. The one who repents sincerely effects nothing less than this: he does not allow his wrong-doing to remain unpunished. Thus God spares the one who does not spare himself, but no one who despises His high and holy judgment escapes it. But, if He shows such patience by sparing the wicked and abandoned, and by granting them life and health, although He knows that many of them will not do penance, how much more, in the case of those who promise amendment, even though we are not sure whether they will do what they promise, should we be merciful to the extent of bending your inflexible decision by interceding for them! Without presumption, because He commands it, we pray for them to God from whom none of their future conduct is hidden.

Vice, however, sometimes makes such inroads among men that, even after they have done penance and have been readmitted to the Sacrament of the altar, they commit the same or more grievous sins, yet God makes His sun to rise even on such men and gives His gifts of life and health as

lavishly as He did before their fall. And, although that same opportunity of penance is not again granted them in the Church,⁴ God does not forget to exercise His patience toward them. Suppose one of these were to say to us: 'Either give me the same chance of doing penance again or pronounce me hopeless and let me do whatever I please as far as my resources allow and human laws do not forbid, indulging in illicit love and every kind of riotous living, condemned, indeed, by God but praised by most men; or, if you withdraw me from this baseness, tell me whether it will do me any good for the next life to despise in this life all the enticements of the most seductive pleasure, to curb the impulses of my passions, to chastise my body by withholding from it many lawful and allowable pleasures, to punish myself by penance more severe than the former, to groan more sorrowfully, to weep more freely, to live better, to give more lavish alms to the poor, to burn more ardently with that charity which "covereth a multitude of sins,"'⁵ would anyone of us be so far gone in folly as to say to this man: 'None of those acts will do you any good for the life to come; go and enjoy the sweetness of this life at least'? May God keep this monstrous and sacrilegious madness far from us! It may, therefore, be a careful and useful enactment that the opportunity of that very humble penance be granted only once in the Church, lest that remedy, by becoming common, be less helpful to sick souls, for it is now more effective by being more respected. Yet, who would dare to say to God: 'Why do you pardon this man a second time when he has been caught again in the snare of sin after his first penance?' Who would dare to say that such are not included in the saying of the Apostle: 'Knowest thou not that the patience of God leadeth thee to penance?''⁶ or that

4 This applied only to public *canonical* penance, and did not imply refusal of sacramental absolution to relapsed but sincere penitents.

5 1 Peter 4.8.

6 Cf. Rom. 2.4.

this other saying is limited so as to exclude them: 'Blessed are all they that trust in him,'⁷ or that the following does not apply to them: 'Do ye manfully and let your heart be strengthened, all ye that hope in the Lord?'⁸

Since, therefore, God shows such great patience and mercy toward sinners that they are not damned forever if they amend their conduct in this life, and since He looks to no one to show Him mercy, because no one is happier than He, no one more powerful, no one more just, it follows that we men ought to be such toward other men, for, whatever praise we heap up on this life of ours, we never say that it is without sin, because, if we did, 'We deceive ourselves,' as it is written, 'and the truth is not in us.'⁹ Consequently, although the prosecutor and the defender are two different persons, and the role of intercessor is not the same as that of judge—it would take too long, and it is not necessary in this speech to discourse on these various duties—the very avengers of crime, who are not to be influenced by their personal anger but are to act as agents of the law, and those who enforce the law against proved injuries done to others, not to themselves, as judges should do, all these quail before the divine judgment, recalling that they have need of the mercy of God for their own sins, and they do not think they do an injury to their office if they show mercy to those over whom they have the lawful power of life and death.

When the Jews brought the woman taken in adultery to the Lord Christ they tempted Him by saying that the Law commanded such a person to be stoned, and when they asked what He would command for her He answered: 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.'¹⁰

⁷ Ps. 2.13.

⁸ Ps. 30.25.

⁹ 1 John 1.8.

¹⁰ John 8.3-7.

Thus, He did not reject the Law which commanded the stoning of women guilty of this sin, and at the same time, by rousing fear in those whose verdict could have put her to death, He recalled them to thoughts of mercy. I think that upon hearing this verdict of the Lord, her husband himself, if he was there and was demanding satisfaction for this breach of marital fidelity, was thoroughly frightened into changing his mind from its desire for revenge into a sentiment of pardon. See how the accuser is warned not to seek vengeance for his personal injuries, when even judges are thus forbidden to avenge themselves in punishing an adulteress, and are obliged to enforce the Law, not to indulge their private feeling! Thus, when Joseph, to whom the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Lord, was espoused, discovered that she was with child and knew that it was not his child, he could only believe that she was an adulteress, yet he was unwilling to punish her, although he was not thereby accessory to the sin. This good intention was credited to him as virtue; therefore this is written of him: 'And being a just man, and not willing publicly to expose her, he was minded to put her away privately. But while he thought on these things, the Angel appeared to him'¹¹ and revealed to him that what he had thought was the result of sin was the act of God.

If, then, the hurt feeling of the accuser and the rigor of the judge are tempered by the knowledge of our common human weakness, what do you think the defender or the intercessor ought to do for the accused, when even you good men who are now judges, after having gained much experience by pleading men's cases in the law courts, know how much more willingly you usually undertake a defense than a prosecution? Yet there is a great difference between the defender and the intercessor, for the former expends his effort chiefly in diminishing or covering up the charge of

¹¹ Matt. 1.18-20.

guilt, while the intercessor works for the removal or reduction of the penalty, even when there is evidence of guilt. The just who are with God perform this service for sinners; sinners themselves are exhorted to do the same for themselves, for it is written: 'Confess your sins one to another and pray one for another.'¹² Every man claims for himself from every other man, where possible, this human consideration, for what each one would punish if it occurred in his own house he wishes to leave unpunished in another's house. For, if he is summoned to a friend's house and if the friend is angry in his presence at someone on whom he has the power to avenge himself, or if he suddenly comes upon an angry man, he is considered, not a man of great uprightness, but a most inhumane one, if he does not intervene. I know that you yourself with some of your friends in the Church at Carthage interceded for a cleric whose bishop was deservedly angry with him—and certainly there was no fear there of a physical punishment, but of a disciplinary measure short of bloodshed—yet, when you wished something to go unpunished which even you disapproved of, we did not estimate you as favorers of guilt; we listened to you as most considerate intercessors. So, if it is right for you to moderate an ecclesiastical sanction by intercession, how much more ought a bishop to intercede against your sword, since the sanction is invoked that the one against whom it is directed may lead a good life, but the sword is drawn that he may not live at all!

Finally, the Lord Himself intervened among men that the adulteress might not be stoned, and thus He commended to us the duty of intercession, except that He achieved by fear what we gain by prayer. He is the Lord, we are the servants; He used fear in such a way that we ought to be afraid, for who of us is without sin? When He said to those who offered the sinful woman to Him for punishment that he who knew

¹² James 5.16.

himself to be without sin should first cast a stone at her, their savagery died as their conscience trembled, for then they slipped away from that gathering and left the poor woman alone with the merciful Lord. Let the piety of Christians yield to this sentence as the impiety of the Jews yielded to it; let the humility of adorers yield as the pride of persecutors has yielded; let the submission of the faithful yield as the lying pretense of the tempter yielded. Pardon the wicked, good Sir; be more perfect as you are more merciful, humble yourself more profoundly as you rise higher by your power.

Looking upon your conduct, I have called you a good man, but do you look upon the words of Christ and say to yourself: 'None is good but God alone.'¹³ Although this is true—and Truth has said it—it ought not to be imagined that I said that through a deceitful flattery, or that I set myself up as if in contradiction to the Lord's words, calling you a good man, whereas He says: 'None is good but God alone,' for the Lord did not contradict Himself when He said: 'A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things.'¹⁴ God, therefore, is uniquely good, and this He cannot lose. He is good; He is not good by sharing in any other good, because the good by which He is good is Himself. But, when a man is good, his good is from God, because he cannot be his own good. All who become good do so through His spirit; our nature has been created to attain to Him through acts of its own will. If we are to become good, it is important for us to receive and hold what He gives, who is good in Himself; whoever neglects this is evil in himself. Therefore, in so far as a man acts uprightly, that is, performs his good works intelligently, lovingly, and devoutly, in so far

¹³ Mark 10.18; Luke 18; 19.

¹⁴ Matt. 12.15; Luke 6.45.

he is good; whereas, in so far as he sins, that is, turns away from truth and love and piety, in so far he is evil. But, who is without some sin in this life? We say a man is good whose good deeds predominate, and a man is perfect whose sin is very slight.

For this reason, those whom the Lord Himself calls good because they receive a share of divine grace He also calls evil because they have the defects of human weakness, until the whole of which we are composed is healed of all evil tendency and crosses over into that life where there will be no more sin forever. Certainly it was the good, not the wicked, whom He taught to pray when He instructed them to say: 'Our Father who art in heaven.'¹⁵ These, then, become sons of God, not by natural generation, but by grace; to them, as to those who receive Him, 'He gave power to be made the sons of God.'¹⁶ In the fashion of the Scriptures this spiritual generation is called adoption,¹⁷ to distinguish it from the generation of God from God, of the Co-eternal from the Eternal; hence it is written: 'Who shall declare his generation?'¹⁸ He showed then that those are good who by His will say truthfully to God: 'Our Father who art in heaven,' but in the same prayer He taught them to say, among other things: 'Forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors.'¹⁹ Although it is evident that these debts are sins, He afterward expressed this more definitely when He said: 'For if you will forgive men their offenses, your Father will forgive you also your offenses.'²⁰ The baptized recite this prayer, and thenceforth none of their past sins remain, for Holy Church grants the baptized forgiveness of all. But, as they live afterward in a state of

¹⁵ Matt. 6.9.

¹⁶ John 1.12.

¹⁷ Rom. 8.15; 9.4; Gal. 4.5; Eph. 1.5.

¹⁸ Isa. 53.8.

¹⁹ Matt. 6.12.

²⁰ Matt. 6.14.

mortal frailty, they necessarily contract other guilt which requires forgiveness; otherwise they could not truthfully say: 'Forgive us our debts.' They are good, then, in virtue of being sons of God, but, in so far as they sin, as they admit by their own truthful confession, they are evil.

Possibly, someone may say that there is a difference between the sins of the good and the sins of the bad, which is not improbably said on frequent occasions. Nevertheless, the Lord Jesus spoke without any ambiguity when He said that God was the Father of those whom He called evil. In the same sermon in which He taught that prayer, He said in another place, exhorting them to pray to God: 'Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you. For everyone that asketh receiveth and he that seeketh findeth and to him that knocketh it shall be opened'; and a little further on: 'If you then being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?'²¹ Is God, then, the Father of evil men? Perish the thought! How, then, does He say 'Your Father who is in heaven' to those whom He addresses as 'you, being evil,' except that Truth shows both what we are by God's goodness and what we are by human defect, praising the one, correcting the other? Well was it said by Seneca,²² a contemporary of the Apostles, several of whose letters²³ to the Apostle Paul are extant: 'He who hates bad men hates all men.'²⁴ Yet, bad men are to be loved, so that they may not continue to be bad, just as sick men are to be loved so that they may not remain sick, but may be cured.

²¹ Matt. 7.7,8,11; Luke 11.9,10,13.

²² Latin writer and Stoic philosopher (A.D. 2-65). His *Moral Essays* commended him to early Christian authorities and led to the belief that he had known St. Paul.

²³ Regarded by modern criticism as pious forgeries.

²⁴ Cf. *De ira* 2.6-10; 3.26,28; *De beneficiis* 4.26; 5.17.3; 7.27.

Whatever sin we commit during our sojourn in this life, after that remission of sin which is effected by baptism, even if such sin is not of a kind to entail segregation from the divine altar, is not expiated by unprofitable regret, but by the sacrifices of mercy. Therefore, what we accomplish in making you act on our intercession you know that you offer to God for yourselves, for you need the mercy which you grant to others. Notice who said: 'Forgive and you shall be forgiven, give and it shall be given to you.'²⁵ Yet, even if our life were such that there would be no reason for us to say: 'Forgive us our debts,'²⁶ our soul ought to be more full of mercy the more it is free from evil, so that, if we are not pierced through by the words of the Lord: 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her,' we may at least follow the example of Him who was certainly without sin, and who said to the woman, deserted by her terrified captors: 'Neither will I condemn thee, go and now sin no more.'²⁷ The sinful woman could have feared, after the departure of those who had recognized their own sins as a prelude to forgiving another's, that He who was without sin might have condemned her with perfect justice. But, when she answered that no man had condemned her, He, untroubled in conscience and overflowing with mercy, said: 'Neither will I condemn thee,' as if He were saying: 'If wickedness could pardon thee, why dost thou fear innocence?' And lest He should seem to approve rather than to forgive her evil deeds, He said: 'Go and now sin no more,' to show that He pardoned the person but did not condone the guilt of the person. You see, then, that it is a matter of religion and does not involve us in a share of the evil-doing when we intercede, if not as criminals for criminals, at least as sinners

²⁵ Luke 6.37,38.

²⁶ Matt. 6.12; Luke 11.4.

²⁷ John 8.7; 11.

for sinners, and, I think, with sinners—please take this as spoken sincerely and without offense.

Surely, it is not without purpose that we have the institution of the power of kings, the death penalty of the judge, the barbed hooks of the executioner, the weapons of the soldier, the right of punishment of the overlord, even the severity of the good father. All those things have their methods, their causes, their reasons, their practical benefits. While these are feared, the wicked are kept within bounds and the good live more peacefully among the wicked. However, men are not to be called good because they refrain from wrong-doing through their fear of such things—no one is good through dread of punishment but through love of righteousness—even so, it is not without advantage that human recklessness should be confined by fear of the law so that innocence may be safe among evil-doers, and the evil-doers themselves may be cured by calling on God when their freedom of action is held in check by fear of punishment. However, the intercession of bishops is not a violation of this arrangement of human affairs; on the contrary, there would be neither motive nor opportunity for intervention if it were not for this. The more the penalty of the offender is deserved, the more gratefully the bounty of the intercessor and of the one who pardons is received. It is for this reason, as I see it, that a more unyielding justice shines forth in the Old Testament in the time of the ancient Prophets, to show that penalties were levied against the wicked for a good purpose; but in the New Testament we are urged to pardon offenders with mercy, either as a saving remedy by which our own sins may be pardoned, or as a means of commending gentleness, so that truth, when preached by those who pardon, may not be so much feared as loved.

It is a matter of great importance what intention a man has in showing leniency. Just as it is sometimes mercy to punish, so

it may be cruelty to pardon. For, to use a well-worn case as an example, who would not truthfully say that a person is cruel who would allow a child to play with snakes because he was obstinately set on so doing? Who would not call another kind-hearted who would restrain the child even to the extent of beating him if words had no effect? For this reason, restraint should not go so far as death, because there must be someone to whom restraint is beneficial. Yet it makes a great difference when one man is killed by another, whether it happened through a desire of injuring him, or of carrying off something dishonestly, as it might be done by an enemy, a thief; or whether it happened in the course of inflicting punishment or carrying out an order, as by a judge, an executioner; or through self-defense or the rescue of another, as a thief is killed by a traveler or an enemy by a soldier. And sometimes the one who was the cause of death is more at fault than the killer, as would be the case if a man were to default on the one who stood bail for him, and the latter should pay the required penalty instead of the other. Nevertheless, not everyone who causes another's death is guilty. What if a man were to seek to ravish someone and should kill himself because he did not get his wish? Or if a son, fearing the blows which he deserved from his father, should kill himself by falling? Or if someone should commit suicide because one man had been set free or to prevent another from being freed? Because these circumstances have been the cause of another's death, are we to consent to sin? are we to deprive a father of the authority to inflict punishment for wrongdoing—which is done through a desire of correcting, not of injuring—or are we to forego the works of mercy? When these things happen, we owe them human regret, but we have no right for that reason to put restraint on the will of the doers to prevent them from happening again.

In the same way, when we intercede for an offender who

deserves condemnation, there sometimes are consequences which we do not intend, either in the person who is set free through our intercession, so that he goes rioting about more extravagantly, because his unchecked boldness goes to greater lengths of passion, being ungrateful for the leniency shown, and his single escape from death may be the cause of many other deaths; or it may be that the object of our kindness changes for the better and mends his morals, but he may be the cause of another's perishing as a result of an evil life, because the latter, seeing that the former has escaped punishment, commits the same crimes or even worse ones. Yet, I think, these evil consequences are not to be laid to our charge when we intercede with you, but, rather, the good aims which we have in view and which we intend when we act thus, that is, to commend mildness so as to win men's love for the word of truth, and to ensure that those who are freed from temporal death may so live as not to fall into eternal death from which they can never be freed.

There is good, then, in your severity which works to secure our tranquility, and there is good in our intercession which works to restrain your severity. Do not be displeased at being petitioned by the good, because the good are not displeased that you are feared by the wicked. Even the Apostle Paul used fear to check the evil deeds of men, fear not only of the judgment to come but even of your present instruments of torture, asserting that they form part of the plan of divine providence, when he said: 'Let every soul be subject to higher powers, for there is no power but from God; and those that are ordained of God. Therefore he that resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God, and they that resist, purchase to themselves damnation: for princes are not a terror to the good work but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good and thou shalt have praise for the same; for he is God's minister to thee for good. But

if thou do that which is evil, fear, for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath upon him that doth evil. Wherefore be subject of necessity, not only for wrath but also for conscience sake. For therefore also you pay tribute, for they are the ministers of God, serving unto this purpose. Render therefore to all men their dues, tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor. Owe no man anything but to love one another.²⁸ These words of the Apostle show the usefulness of your severity. Thus, as those who fear are ordered to render love to those who cause them fear, so those who cause fear are ordered to render love to those who fear. Let nothing be done through desire of hurting, but all through love of helping, and nothing will be done cruelly, inhumanly. Thus, the sentence of the judge will be feared, but not so as to cause the religious motive of the intercessor to be scorned, because it is only by yielding and pardoning that the good effect of amending a man's life is produced. But, if perversity and impiety are so great that neither punishment nor pardon can avail to correct them, it is still true that, whether severity or leniency is shown, the obligation of charity is fulfilled by the good through their intention and upright conscience which God beholds.

In the following part of your letter where you say: 'But now human behavior has come to this pass that men wish to have the punishment of their crime remitted and at the same time to keep the profit which they gained by their evil deeds,' you are speaking of the lowest kind of men, who are absolutely unable to be helped by the remedy of repentance. If the offense committed has involved theft, and restitution is not made, although it is possible to make it, there is no repentance but only pretense. If, however, there is true repentance, the sin will not be forgiven unless there is restitution

²⁸ Rom. 13.1-8.

of stolen goods, but, as I said, where restitution is possible. Often, however, the thief dissipates the goods either by connivance with other offenders or by living an evil life himself, and has nothing left with which to make restitution. To him we certainly cannot say: 'Pay back what you took,' unless we believe that he has it and denies it. But in the case where he suffers some physical punishment at the hands of the offended party, because it is believed that he has the means of paying back, he is free of guilt, because, even if he has no means of paying back what he took, he pays the penalty of the sin by which he wrongfully stole through the corporal pains applied to make him pay back. It is not an uncivilized thing to intercede for such persons, as one does for those convicted of crimes, since it is not done to save them entirely from making restitution, but so that man may not show cruelty to man, especially the one who has already been given satisfaction for the guilty act, but still wants his money and fears to be cheated of it, without seeking to be avenged. Finally, in such cases, if we can convince the injured party that those for whom we intercede do not possess what is demanded, there is a cessation of their importunity on us. Sometimes, indeed, merciful men, in a state of real doubt, are not willing to inflict certain punishment for the sake of uncertain money. This is the mercy which it befits us to challenge and exhort them to show, for it is better for you to lose the money if he has it than to torture or kill him if he does not have it. In this case it is more effective to intercede with creditors than with judges, because the judge who has the power to enforce restitution and does not do it might seem to be a party to the theft, although in using force he must display a regard for honesty without losing human feeling.

This, indeed, I would say with complete assurance, that the one who intercedes for a man to save him from restoring

his ill-gotten goods and who fails, when someone has fled to him for refuge, to force him to make restitution as far as he honestly can, is a party to the theft and the guilt. It would be more merciful for us to withhold our succor from such men than to offer it to them, for he does not succor who helps someone to sin when he should hinder him and turn him away from it. But can we or ought we for that reason either extort the money from them or hand them over to another's extortion? We act within the limits of our episcopal jurisdiction, threatening them sometimes with human, but especially and always with divine, judgment. In the case of those who refuse to make restitution, of whom we know that they have stolen and have the means to pay, we rebuke and reproach them, showing our detestation of them, some in private, some publicly, according as the diversity of characters shows the possibility of reforming them. Yet, in this we avoid rousing them to greater madness; sometimes, if an aggravation of the fault to be cured is not feared, we even cut them off from Communion at the holy altar.

Indeed, it often happens that they deceive us either by saying that they have not stolen or by insisting that they have no means of making restitution, but often, too, you are deceived by thinking either that we do not make them pay back or that they have the means of paying back. All or almost all of us men love to call or consider our suspicions knowledge, since we are influenced by the credible evidence of circumstances; yet some credible things are false, just as some incredible ones are true. Therefore, mentioning some who 'wish to have the punishment of their crime remitted and at the same time to keep the profit which they gained by their evil deeds,' you added something else when you said: 'Your priestly office thinks that intercession should be made for these, also.' It is possible that you might know something I do not know and that I might think I ought to

intercede for someone in a case where I could be deceived, but you could not, because I believed that a man did not possess what you knew that he did possess. Thus it could be that we might not have the same idea of a man's guilt, but neither of us would approve a failure to make restitution. As men we have different ideas about a man, but in the concept of justice we are one. In the same way it is also possible for me to know that someone has nothing, while you are not too sure that he has, but you have good grounds for suspecting him and in this way it seems to you that I intercede for a man 'who wishes to have the punishment of his crime remitted and to keep the profit which he gained by his evil deed.' To sum up, then, neither to you, nor to men such as we rejoice to find you—if any others can be found—nor to those who 'with great eagerness pursue interests foreign to them, utterly unprofitable and even extremely dangerous and deadly,'²⁹ nor to my own heart would I dare to say, as I would not think or decide that intercession should be made for anyone to enable him to possess unpunished what he has wrongfully taken, but I hold rather that he should restore what he has taken, when his offense has been pardoned, always supposing that he still has either what he took or some other means of making restitution.

It is not true, however, that everything which is taken from an unwilling donor is wrongfully taken. Most people do not want to give due credit to their doctor, or to pay a workman his hire, yet when these receive their due from unwilling debtors they do not acquire anything unlawfully; on the contrary, it would be wrong to deprive them of it. But there is no reason for a judge to take money for a just judgment or a witness for true testimony, because the advocate is paid for legal protection and the lawyer for truthful advice; the two former have to make an inquiry into both

²⁹ Sallust, *Jugurtha* 1.5.

sides, the latter stand on one side. But when verdicts and testimony are sold, they are unfair and untrue, because just and true ones are not to be sold, and it is much more infamous for money to be taken when it is infamously even if willingly paid. The one who pays for a just verdict usually demands his money back on the ground that it was wrongfully taken from him, since justice ought not to be for sale; while the one who pays for an unjust verdict would like to demand his money back, if he were not afraid or ashamed of having paid it.

There are other personages of lower rank who not uncommonly take pay from both sides, such as a court attendant by whom a service is performed or on whom it devolves. What is extorted by these with excessive dishonesty is usually demanded back, but if paid according to accepted custom it is not asked back, and those who do demand it contrary to custom we disapprove of more vigorously than those who accept it according to custom, since many officials, necessary to human affairs, are influenced or attracted by gains of this kind. If these latter change their way of life and attain to a higher degree of virtuous living, they are more ready to distribute to the poor, as if it were their own, what they have acquired in this way than they are to pay it back to those from whom they have received it as a form of restitution of what is not their own. However, we think that those who have done an injury to human society by theft, rapine, calumny, oppression, housebreaking ought to pay what they owe rather than give it away, following the example of the tax collector, Zacchaeus, in the Gospel, who received the Lord into his house, was suddenly converted to a holy life, and said: "The half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have wronged any man of anything I restore him fourfold."³⁰

If there is to be a more sincere regard for justice, it would

³⁰ Luke 19.8.

be more honest to say to the advocate: 'Pay back what you received when you stood against truth, supported evil-doing, deceived the judge, won your case by lying, as you see that many of the most honorable and eloquent men seem to allow themselves to do, not only with safety but even with renown,' rather than to say to any minor official struggling to perform some duty: 'Pay back what you received when at the judge's order you held a man who was needed for some case, when you tied him so that he could not resist, shut him up so that he could not run away, and finally produced him while the trial was going on, or dismissed him when it was finished.' It is easy to see why no one says this to an advocate, because a man naturally does not wish to ask back what he gave a patron to win a bad case, just as he does not wish to pay back what he received from his opponent when he won his case dishonestly. Finally, how hard it is to find an advocate or a truly good man who has been an advocate, who would say to his client: 'Take back what you paid me for representing you so dishonestly, and give back to your opponent what you took from him as a result of my dishonest pleading.' Yet, anyone who thoroughly repents of his dishonest former life ought to do even this, so that, if the dishonest litigant is not willing to make amends for his injustice after this warning, he at least will take no pay for the injustice. Otherwise, it might happen that there is an obligation to pay back what is secretly taken from another by theft, but none to pay back what is gotten by deceiving the judge and evading the law in the very court of law where offenses are punished. And what about lending money at interest,³¹ which the very laws and judges require to be paid back? Who is more cruel: the one who steals from or cheats a rich man or the one who destroys a poor man by usury? What is acquired this way is certainly ill-gotten gain, and I would

31 Forbidden by early Church law.

wish restitution to be made of it, but it is not possible to sue for it in court.

And now, if we look carefully at what is written: 'The whole world is the wealth of the faithful man, but the unfaithful one has not a penny,'³² do we not prove that those who seem to rejoice in lawfully acquired gains, and do not know how to use them, are really in possession of other men's property? Certainly, what is lawfully possessed is not another's property, but 'lawfully' means justly and justly means rightly. He who uses his wealth badly possesses it wrongfully, and wrongful possession means that it is another's property. You see, then, how many there are who ought to make restitution of another's goods, although those to whom restitution is due may be few; wherever they are, their claim to just possession is in proportion to their indifference to wealth. Obviously, no one possesses justice unlawfully: whoever does not love it does not have it; but money is wrongly possessed by bad men while good men who love it least have the best right to it. In this life the wrong of evil possessors is endured and among them certain laws are established which are called civil laws, not because they bring men to make a good use of their wealth, but because those who make a bad use of it become thereby less injurious. This comes about either because some of them become faithful and fervent—and these have a right to all things—or because those who live among them are not hampered by their evil deeds, but are tested until they come to that City where they are heirs to eternity, where the just alone have a place, the wise alone leadership, and those who are there possess what is truly their own. Yet, even here, we do not intercede to prevent restitution from being made, according to earthly customs and laws, although we should like you to be indulgent to evil-doers, not to make them take pleasure or persist in their

32 Prov. 17.6 (Septuagint).

evil, but because, whenever any of them become good, God is appeased by the sacrifice of mercy, and if evil-doers did not find Him merciful there would be no good men.

For a long time I seem to have been putting a burden on a busy man by my talk, whereas it would have been possible to explain quickly what was asked by a man as clear-sighted and experienced as you are. I ought to have made an end of this long since, and I would have if I had thought you would be the only one to read what you urged me to write. May you enjoy a happy life in Christ, my dearest son.

154. Macedonius to his justly revered lord and truly estimable father, Augustine (c. 414)

I am deeply impressed by your wisdom, both in the writings which you have published and in those which you did not refuse to send,¹ taking pity on my anxiety. The former have a superlative degree of penetration, knowledge, and holiness, and the latter are so full of moderation that, if I do not do what you advise, I should have to account the fault in myself, not in my office, justly revered lord and estimable father. For you do not insist, as most men in your circle do, on extorting from me whatever any anxious client happens to want, but you suggest what you think can properly be asked of a judge weighed down by many cares, and you do this with a due regard and respect, which is a most successful way of overcoming difficulties among good people. Therefore, I have granted to those you recommended the fulfillment of their desire, having previously opened the way to hope.

I have finished your Books;² they were not so dull and quiet that they allowed me to attend to anything but them-

¹ Letter 153.

² Cf. Letter 152 n. 3.

selves; they took hold of me, and while they wrested me from some of my anxieties, they bound me with their own chains—may God be good to me!—so that I am in doubt what to admire most in them: the lofty state of the priesthood, the teachings of philosophy, the extensive knowledge of history, or the charm of their style, which is such as to bewitch even the unlearned, so that they cannot stop while they are reading, and when they have finished they want to take them up again. Even those who boast of holding to their opinion are convinced that, in the inexplicable way of nature, evil happenings came out of those good old times, as they call them, and that all men were led astray by their own pleasures, imbued as they were with a certain sweetness; that through these they were led not to happiness but to the abyss; whereas these teachings of ours, these mysteries of the one, true God, besides promising eternal life, assuage these earthly and inevitable circumstances into which we are born. You used the most impressive example of the recent calamity,³ which strengthens your argument very solidly; still, if you could have chosen another, I wish you had not relied on this one. But, if ever a foolish complaint had arisen on the part of those who had to be convinced, you would be bound to marshal the arguments of truth.

I have written this in the midst of my preoccupation with other cares, which may be vain when we think of the end of the world, but are still pressing enough, being part of the consequence of our being born. If I have time, and if my life holds out, I shall write again from Italy, so as to pay my debt to such learning by due if not adequate services. May the almighty God keep your Holiness safe and happy for an extended age, justly revered lord and truly estimable father.

³ The siege of Rome by Alaric.

155. *Augustine, bishop, servant of Christ and of His family,
gives greeting in the Lord to his beloved son,
Macedonius (c. 414)*

Although I do not recognize in myself the wisdom with which you endow me, I do owe and return the most lively thanks to your great and sincere kindness toward me, and I am delighted that the result of my studies has given pleasure to a man of such character and influence as you are. My joy is the greater because I discern the yearning of your mind, with its love for eternal life and truth and charity itself, directed toward that divine and heavenly country whose king is Christ, and in which alone we find eternal happiness if we live uprightly and devoutly in this world, and also because I see you drawing near to that life and I embrace you in your ardent desire to attain it. This is the source from which true friendship flows, not to be valued by temporal advantages, but to be drunk in through freely given love. No one can be a true friend of man unless he is first a friend of Truth; if friendship does not come into being spontaneously, it cannot exist at all.

The philosophers have much to say on this subject, but one does not find among them true affection, that is, true worship of the true God, to which all the activities of right living ought to be directed. This arises chiefly, as I understand it, because they wanted to construct their own happiness for themselves, in one way or another, and they thought this was more a matter of doing than of receiving, whereas God is its only giver. Only He who made man makes man's happiness. He who lavishes such gifts on His creatures, both bad and good—existence, human nature, vigorous faculties of sense, strength of body, abundance of resources—will give

Himself to the good to be their happiness, because their goodness is also His gift. But there are others who, in spite of this toilsome life, of these bodies doomed to death under this burden of corruptible flesh, have chosen to be the originators and the creators, so to speak, of their own happiness, striving for it and holding it as if it were the result of their own strength, not seeking it and hoping for it from that source of strength, and these have not been able to see that God resists their pride. Hence, they fell into the most extravagant error, as when they assert that a wise man is happy even in the bull of Phalaris,¹ and are then forced to admit that happiness is sometimes to be shunned. For they yield to an accumulation of bodily ills and decree that in their most grievous afflictions it is allowable to deprive oneself of life. I do not wish to discuss here how wicked it is for an innocent man to kill himself, something which even a guilty person has absolutely no right to do; I have spoken at length on this in the first of those three books² which you have so kindly and so thoroughly read. But let us consider with certainty, let us determine, not proudly but temperately, how that life can be happy which the wise man does not hold and enjoy, but which he is obliged to forego by laying hands on himself.

There is in Cicero, as you know, in the last part of Book 5 of the *Tusculan Disputations*,³ a passage worth noting in connection with what I am saying. When he was treating of physical blindness, he asserted that it was possible for a wise man to be happy in spite of being blind, and he said that there were many things in which he could take pleasure through the sense of hearing; and likewise, if he was deaf he

1 A tyrant of Sicily (c. 550 B.C.) who shut rebellious subjects in a brazen bull and roasted them to death.

2 *City of God* 1.17-28.

3 Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 5,38; 110; 40.117.

transferred the objects in which he delighted to the sense of sight, but if a man were deprived of both faculties, if he were both blind and deaf, he did not dare to make the same statement and say that he was happy. He added, however, that if a man suffered most intense bodily pains which fell short of causing death, he should kill himself and so reach the harbor of unconsciousness, having freed himself by this courageous act. So the wise man yields to unbounded misfortunes and is overpowered by them to the extent of being forced to commit murder upon himself! If he does not spare himself, whom would he spare in order to escape these evils? Certainly he is always happy, certainly he cannot lose by any overwhelming misfortune this happiness which he has set up by his own power. And behold! In blindness and deafness and intense bodily sufferings he has either lost his happiness, or, if his life is still happy in the midst of these trials, it follows from the arguments of the most learned men in this field that there is sometimes a happiness which the wise man cannot bear, or—what is even more senseless—which a wise man ought not to bear, but should flee from it, break it off, cast it away and cut himself off from it by the sword or by poison or by any other form of voluntary death. Thus he may reach the harbor of unconsciousness, or become entirely non-existent as the Epicureans and others who share a like folly think. Thus he is happy because he has been freed from that other happiness as if it were a pestilence. What an extreme display of pride! If the happy life is found in the midst of bodily suffering, why does the wise man not remain and enjoy it? But, if life is wretched, I ask you what else but pride prevents you from admitting it, from praying to God, from making supplication to His justice and mercy, for He has the power to change or moderate the evils of this life, to arm us with strength to bear them, or to set us free from them entirely, and give us after them a truly happy life

where no evil is admitted and the supreme good is never lost?

This is the reward of faithful souls, and in the hope of attaining it we pass through this temporal and mortal life, as something endurable rather than pleasurable, and we bear its evils courageously with a right understanding and with divine help when we rejoice in our confident hope of eternal goods, relying on the sure promise of God. The Apostle encourages us to do this when he says: 'Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation,'⁴ and by putting 'rejoicing in hope' first he shows the reason for 'patient in tribulation.' This is the hope to which I exhort you through Jesus Christ our Lord. God Himself was our Master when He hid the majesty of His divinity, appearing in the weakness of flesh, and taught us not only by the prophetic utterance of His speech but also by the example of His Passion and Resurrection. By the one He showed us what we should bear, by the other what we ought to hope for. Men would have shown their gratitude for this if they had not been puffed up and carried away by empty pride, which made them try to fashion their own happiness for themselves, whereas God alone truthfully promises His worshipers that He will grant them happiness after this life. Indeed, there is much more meaning to that statement of Cicero where he says: 'This life is indeed a death which I could weep over if I found it pleasing.'⁵ How is it, then, that it is counted a happy life if it is fitting to weep over it? Is it not rather proved to be a sad life since it is fitting to weep over it? Therefore, I beg of you, good Sir, accustom yourself in this life to find your happiness in hope, that you may find it in reality when the reward of eternal bliss is granted to your constancy and devotion.

⁴ Rom. 12.12.

⁵ Cicero, *Tusc. Disp.* 1.31; 75.

If the length of my letter bores you, 'You cooked this dish yourself'⁶ when you called me wise. Hence, I have ventured to say these things to you, not to display wisdom as it may be in me, but to show what it would be in you. In the present life wisdom consists in the true worship of the true God; in the life to come it is to be an assured and entire enjoyment of Him; here, constant devotion; there, everlasting bliss. If I have any of that wisdom which is the only true wisdom, I have received it from God; I have not provided it for myself, and I confidently hope that it will be completed in me by Him from whom I humbly rejoice that it has been begun, not distrustful of what He has not yet given, nor ungrateful for what He has given. If anything in me is worthy of praise, it is because of His gift, not for any ability or merit of mine. Some keen and highly endowed intellects have fallen into grievous errors because they rushed along with too great confidence in their own strength, and failed to make humble and sincere prayer to God to show them the way. But what can any man deserve when He who brought us freely offered grace, not merited reward, found all men sinners and, free from sin Himself, set all men free?

If, then, true strength delights us, let us say to Him what we read in the sacred writings: 'I will love thee, O Lord, my strength,'⁷ and if we wish to be truly happy—as we cannot fail to wish—let us hold with faithful heart to what we learn in the same writing: 'Blessed is the man whose trust is in the name of the Lord and who hath not had regard to vanities and lying follies.'⁸ How great, indeed, is the vanity, how great the folly, how great the lie, for a mortal man—leading a life harried by the vicissitudes of soul and body, weighed down by so many sins, subject to so many temptations, a

6 Terence, *Phormio* 318.

7 Ps. 17.2.

8 Ps. 39.5.

prey to so much corruption, doomed to such just penalties—for such a man to trust in himself for his own happiness, when he cannot even guard himself from error in that part of himself most worthy of his nature, that is, his mind and reason, unless God, the light of our minds, assists him! Let us, therefore, I beseech you, cast off the vanities and lying follies of false philosophers, because there will be no strength in us unless He by whom we are helped is with us; there will be no happiness unless He who is our joy is with us, unless His gift of immortality and incorruption swallows up our whole changeable and corruptible nature, which of itself is weak and is, in a sense, the source of all our miseries.

Since we know that you are devoted to the public welfare, you must see how plainly the sacred writings show that the happiness of the state has no other source than the happiness of man. One of the sacred writers, filled with the Holy Spirit, speaks thus as he prays: 'Rescue me out of the hand of strange children, whose mouth hath spoken vanity: and their right hand is the right hand of iniquity; whose sons are as new plants in their youth: their daughters decked out, adorned round about after the similitude of a temple: their storehouse full, flowing out of this into that, their sheep fruitful in young, abounding in their goings forth: their oxen fat. There is no breach of wall nor passage, nor crying out in their streets. They have called the people happy that hath these things, but happy is the people whose God is the Lord.'⁹

You see that a people is not called happy because of an accumulation of earthly good fortune, except by the 'strange children,' that is, by those who do not belong to the regeneration by which we become sons of God. The Psalmist prays to be rescued out of their hand, lest he be drawn by them into that false opinion and into their impious sins. Truly

9 Ps. 143.11-15.

they speak vanity when they 'have called the people happy that hath these things'—the things which he had listed above, in which that good fortune consisted, the only good fortune which the lovers of this world seek. Therefore, 'their right hand is the right hand of iniquity' because they have preferred those things which should have been set aside, as the right hand is preferred to the left. Happiness in life is not to be attributed to the possession of those things; they should be subordinate, not pre-eminent; they are intended to follow, not to lead. If, then, we were to speak to him who prayed thus and desired to be rescued from the 'strange children' who 'called that people happy that hath these things,' and if we said: 'What is your own opinion? What people do you call happy?' he would not say: 'Happy is the people whose strength is in their own mind.' If he had said this, he would, it is true, distinguish that people from the former which made happiness consist in that visible and corporeal good fortune, but he would not yet have passed beyond all the vanities and lying follies, for, as the same writings teach elsewhere: 'Cursed be everyone that placeth his hope in man.'¹⁰ Therefore, he ought not to place it in himself, because he himself is a man. Thus, in order to pass beyond the boundaries of all vanities and lying follies, and to place happiness where it truly exists, he says: 'Happy is the people whose God is the Lord.'

You see, therefore, where we are to seek what all, both learned and unlearned, desire; but many, because of their wanderings and their self-sufficiency, do not know where it is to be sought and found. In a certain divine psalm two classes of men are held up to scorn: both 'they that trust in their own strength' and 'they that glory' in the multitude of their riches,'¹¹ that is, both the philosophers of

¹⁰ Cf. Jer. 17.5.

¹¹ Ps. 48.7.

this world and those who despise even such a philosophy and call that people happy who abound in earthly riches. Therefore, let us ask of the Lord our God, by whom we were created, both the strength to overcome the evils of this life, and happiness in the next life, which we may enjoy in His eternity after this life, so that in the strength and in the reward of the strength 'he that glories,' as the Apostle says, 'may glory in the Lord.'¹² Let us wish this for ourselves, let us wish it for the state of which we are citizens, for the happiness of the state has no other source than the happiness of man, since the state is merely a unified group of men.

Therefore, if all your prudence which makes you try to provide against human vicissitudes, if all the fortitude which keeps you from being frightened by any wickedness directed against you, if all the temperance which shields you from corruption in the midst of such foulness of evil conduct on the part of men, if all the justice which makes you judge rightly as you allot to each one what is his, aims at this, strives for this, that those whose welfare you have at heart may be safe in body and secure from the dishonesty of anyone, that they may enjoy peace and may have 'sons established as new plants, daughters decked out in the similitude of a temple, storehouses full, flowing out of this into that, their sheep fruitful in young, their oxen fat, their property spoiled by no breach of wall, no outcry of quarreling heard in their streets'¹³—in that case, yours are no true virtues, and theirs no true happiness. That respectful attitude of mine which you praised with kind words in your letter should not prevent me from speaking the truth. If, as I say, any administrative act of yours, endowed with the virtues which I have listed, is limited to this end and aim, that men may suffer no undue distress according to the flesh, if you think it is not incumbent

¹² 2 Cor. 10.17.

¹³ Cf. Ps. 143.11-15.

on you that they should make a return for that tranquility which you try to secure for them, that is, not to speak in riddles, that they should worship the true God in whom is all the fruition of the peaceful life, such effort on your part will bring you no return in true happiness.

It seems that I am here speaking disrespectfully, and, in a sense, as if I had forgotten the usual form of my intercession. But, if respect is merely a certain fear of displeasing someone, I am not showing respect by fearing in this case. I should first of all, and with good reason, fear to displease God, and secondly to displease that friendship which you have been so kind as to confer on me, if I were less free in warning you where I think a salutary warning is needed. I should certainly be more respectful when I intercede with you for others, when, in fact I intercede for you yourself, if I spoke freely in proportion to my friendship, and the more faithful I am, the better friend I am, yet I would not say this to you if it were not to show my respect. And if this, as you say, 'is a most successful way of overcoming difficulties among good people,'¹⁴ may it help me with you in your own behalf, that I may enjoy you in Him who has opened for me this door to you, and has given me confidence, especially as what I ask I now think is easy for your mind to accept, supported and strengthened as it is by so many divine helps.

If you recognize that you have received the virtues which you have, and if you return thanks to Him from whom you have received them, directing them to His service even in your secular office; if you rouse the men subject to your authority and lead them to worship God, both by the example of your own devout life and by your zeal for their welfare, whether you rule them by love or by fear; if, in working for their greater security, you have no other aim than that they should thus attain to Him who will be their happiness—

14 Cf. Letter 154.

then yours will be true virtues, then they will be increased by the help of Him whose bounty lavished them on you, and they will be so perfected as to lead you without fail to that truly happy life which is no other than eternal life. In that life, evil will no longer have to be distinguished from good by the virtue of prudence, because there will be no evil there; adversity will not have to be borne with fortitude, because there will be nothing there but what we love; temperance will not be needed to curb our passions, because there will be no enticements to passion there; nor shall we have to practise justice by helping the poor out of our abundance, for there we shall find no poor and no needy. There will be but one virtue there, and it will be the same as the reward of virtue, which the speaker in the sacred writings mentions as the object of his love: 'But it is good for me to stick close to my God.'¹⁵ This will constitute the perfect and eternal wisdom, as it will constitute the truly happy life, because to attain it is to attain the eternal and supreme good, and to stick close to God forever is the sum of our good. Let this be called prudence because it will cling most providently to the good which cannot be lost, and fortitude because it will cling most stoutly to the good from which it cannot be parted, and temperance because it will cling most chastely to the good in which there is no corruption, and justice because it will cling most uprightly to the good to which it is deservedly subject.

Yet, this virtue consists in nothing else but in loving what is worthy of love; it is prudence to choose this, fortitude to be turned from it by no obstacles, temperance to be enticed by no allurements, justice to be diverted by no pride. Why do we choose what we exclusively love, except that we find nothing better? But this is God, and if we prefer or equal anything to Him in our love, we know nothing about loving ourselves.

¹⁵ Ps. 72.28.

We are made better by approaching closer to Him than whom nothing is better; we go to Him not by walking, but by loving. We will have Him more present to us in proportion as we are able to purify the love by which we draw near to Him, for He is not spread through or confined by corporeal space, He is everywhere present and everywhere wholly present, and we go to Him not by the motion of our feet but by our conduct. Conduct is not usually discerned by what one knows but by what he loves; good or bad love makes good or bad conduct. By our crookedness we are far from the uprightness of God; we are made straight by loving what is upright, that we may rightly cling to the upright One.

Let us strive, then, with the greatest possible effort to bring to him those whom we love as ourselves, if we know that we love ourselves by loving Him. For Christ, who is Truth, says that on these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets: that we love God with our whole heart and our whole soul and our whole mind, and that we love our neighbor as ourselves.¹⁶ Obviously, in this passage the neighbor is not to be rated by blood relationship but by the fact that he is a fellow being endowed with reason, which makes all men kin. For, if money is a reason which makes men partners, much more is their common nature a reason to draw them together, not for business purposes but because of their birth. Hence, that writer of comedy whose charming genius is not devoid of the splendor of truth composed this speech where one old man speaks to another:

‘Have you so much time to spare from your own affairs
That you can meddle in other people’s business which
is none of yours?’

and he gives this answer to the other old man:

16 Cf. Matt. 22.40,37,39; Mark 12.30-31; Luke 10.27.

'I am a man: I hold that no human interest is foreign to me.'¹⁷

They say that at that sentence, the whole theatre, though filled with foolish and ignorant people, rang with applause. Thus, the kindship of human souls stirs the feeling of all so naturally that every man feels himself a neighbor of every other man.

Therefore, with that love which the divine law commands, a man ought to love God and himself and his neighbor; yet three commandments were not given and it was not said: 'on these three,' but 'on these two commandments dependeth the whole law and the prophets,' that is, on the love of God with the whole heart and the whole soul and the whole mind, and of the neighbor as oneself, doubtless to make it clear that there is no other love by which a man loves himself than that by which he loves God. Whoever loves himself in any other way ought to be said rather to hate himself, since he thus becomes wicked and is deprived of the light of justice, when he turns from a higher and more excellent good and is directed upon himself as to something lower and defective, and what is so truthfully written then takes place in him: 'He that loveth iniquity hateth his own soul.'¹⁸ Thus, as no one loves himself except by loving God, there was no need of man being commanded to love himself, once the commandment to love God has been given. He ought, then, to love God and his neighbor as himself so as to lead whatever men he can to worship God, using as means either the comforting force of kindness, or the imparting of learning, or the restraint of discipline, because he knows that 'on these two commandments dependeth the whole law and the prophets.'

¹⁷ Terence, *Heautontimorumenos* 75-77.

¹⁸ Ps. 10.6.

Whoever chooses this with careful discrimination is prudent; whoever is turned from it by no trial is strong; he who is enticed by no other pleasure is temperate; the one who is puffed up by no self-esteem is just. By means of these virtues which have been divinely imparted to us by the grace of the Man, Christ Jesus, the Mediator of God between the Father and us, through whom we are reconciled to God in the spirit of charity, after the hostility of our sin, by means of these virtues, I repeat, which are divinely imparted to us, we now live the good life, and afterward receive its reward, the life of happiness, which must necessarily be eternal. In this life these virtues are seen in action, in the next in their effect; here they are at work, there they are our reward; here, their function, there their final end. Therefore, all good and holy men, supported by divine help, in the midst of all kinds of sufferings hear the call of hope of that blessed end where they will be forever happy; but, if they were to remain forever in those same sufferings and most bitter pains, even if they had all possible virtue, no sane or reasonable being could doubt that they would be anything but wretched.

'Godliness,' then, 'which is the true worship of God, is profitable to all things,'¹⁹ since it deflects or blunts the troubles of this life and leads to that other life, our salvation, where we shall suffer no evil and enjoy the supreme and everlasting good. I exhort you as I do myself to pursue this happiness more earnestly and to hold to it with strong constancy. If you were not even now a sharer in it, if you did not judge that your earthly honors should be subordinate to it, you would not have said to the Donatist heretics in your edict designed to bring them back to the unity and peace of Christ: 'This is enacted for your benefit; it is for you that the priests of the incorrupt faith labor, that the august emperor and we, his judges, also labor,' and many other points which you made in

the same edict, so that it is clear that, though you wear the girdle of an earthly judge, you are thinking for the most part of the heavenly country. If I have aimed at speaking to you at too great length about true virtue and true happiness, I beg you not to regard it as an intrusion on your duties, as, indeed, I trust it is not, since you show a disposition so strong and so marvelously worthy of praise that you do not slight the earthly cares while busying yourself more willingly and more intimately with the heavenly ones.

156. Hilarius¹ to Bishop Augustine, his truly holy, deservedly esteemed, and ever-cherished lord (414)

The kindness of your Holiness, known to all, has induced my Insignificance, as some of ours are traveling from Syracuse to Hippo, to entrust them with this letter to your Reverence, object of my praise, begging the supreme Trinity to keep you safe and sound, by the favor of our God, that you may receive and review this writing of mine, holy lord, rightly and deservedly revered, and ever worthy of my affection. Therefore, I ask you to be so kind as to remember me in your holy prayers, and to enlighten my ignorance on some points which certain Christians at Syracuse maintain, saying that it is possible for man to be sinless and to keep the commandments of God with ease, if he wishes; that an unbaptized infant cut off by death cannot justly be deprived of heaven because it is born without sin; that a rich man who continues to live rich cannot enter the kingdom of heaven unless he sells all he has, and that it cannot do him any good to keep the commandments while keeping his riches; that we ought not to

¹ A Sicilian layman, not to be identified with the Hilarius, Bishop of Narbonne of Letter 178, or with the Hilarius, layman of Arles, of Letter 226.

swear at all; and what is the nature of the Church of which it is written that it has neither wrinkle nor spot,² whether it is the one in which we now gather or the one we hope for. Some have made out that it is this Church into which we now gather the people and that it cannot be sinless. On these points, with such appeals as I can make, I beg your Holiness to order us to be more fully instructed, so that we may know how far we ought to hold these views. I pray the mercy of God to keep your Holiness safe for many years, holy lord, rightly and deservedly revered, ever worthy of affection.

*157. Augustine, bishop, servant of Christ and of His Church,
gives greeting in the Lord to his beloved son,
Hilarius (414)*

From your letter I have learned not only of your good health but also of your religious zeal for the Word of God and your devout care for your salvation, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Giving thanks to God, therefore, I have not put off paying the debt of my answer.

Now if you ask whether anyone attains to such perfection of goodness in this life as to live here entirely without sin, note what was said by the Apostle John, whom the Lord loved especially among the disciples. He said: 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.'¹ So, if those of whom you wrote me say that they are without sin, you see that they deceive themselves and the truth is not in them. However, if they confess that they are sinners in order to win the mercy of God, let them refrain from deceiving others in whom they attempt to instil this

² Cf. Eph. 5.27.

¹ John 1.8.

pride. The Lord's Prayer is necessary to all, since the Lord gave it to the very rams of the flock, that is, His Apostles, so that each one may say: 'Forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors.'² But He to whom these words were not necessary, of Him it is to be said that He is without sin. If the Lord had foreseen that there would be some who would be better than His Apostles turned out to be, no doubt He would have taught them another prayer, in which they would not ask to have their sins forgiven, because all had already been forgiven in baptism. If holy Daniel confessed his own sins as well as those of his people, not before men with a false pretense of humility, but before God, that is, in the prayer which he addressed to God, as it is expressed in his truthful utterance,³ then it seems to me there is nothing else to be said to such people but the words which the Lord ordered the Prophet Ezechiel to say to a certain proud man: 'Art thou then wiser than Daniel?'⁴

It is clear, however, that if anyone, helped by the mercy and grace of God, refrains from those sins which are called crimes, and does not fail to wash away the sins which are inseparable from this life by the practice of works of mercy and pious prayers, he will deserve to depart from this life without sin. However, as long as he lives here, he will have some sins, but as these have not been lacking, so the remedies by which they are washed away have been at hand. But, suppose someone takes advantage of the fact that he has heard that no one can live without sin by his own effort, gives himself over to his passions and involves himself in unspeakable crimes, persisting in this wicked and accursed conduct until his last day, even though in the meantime he gives some

² Matt. 6.12.

³ Dan. 9.20.

⁴ Cf. Ezech. 28.3.

alms, he leads an unhappy life and meets an even more unhappy end.

We can, after a fashion, bear with those who say that there either is or has been in this life some just man, in addition to the one Saint of saints, who was entirely sinless. But that other saying of theirs is to be utterly rejected and detested with the utmost execration, when they claim that man's free will is enough to enable him to carry out the commandments of the Lord, even if he is not helped in his good works by the grace of God and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Those who assert this are altogether alien to the grace of God, because, 'not knowing the justice of God,' as the Apostle says of the Jews, 'and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted themselves to the justice of God.'⁵ For, the fulfilling of the Law is nothing if not love⁶ and certainly 'the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts,' not by ourselves or by the strength of our own will, but 'by the Holy Ghost who is given to us.'⁷

Therefore, our free will is able to perform good works if it is helped from above, which happens as a result of humble petition and confession; whereas, if it is deprived of divine help, it may excel in knowledge of the Law, but it will have no solid foundation of justice, and will be puffed up with impious pride and deadly vanity. Again, the Lord's Prayer teaches us this, for it would be useless for us to say in our petition to God, 'Lead us not into temptation,' if this was in our own power and we were able to carry it out without any help from Him. By the saying, 'Lead us not into temptation,' we are to understand: 'Do not abandon us and allow us to be led.' For, 'God is faithful, who will not suffer

⁵ Rom. 10.3.

⁶ Cf. Rom. 13.10.

⁷ Rom. 5.5.

⁸ Matt. 6.13.

you to be tempted above that which you are able, but will make also with temptation issue that you may be able to bear it.⁹ Why does he say that God does this, if it is solely in our power to do it without His help?

The very Law itself was given as a help in this to those who used it lawfully,¹⁰ that they might know through it either how much justice they had received, for which they were to give thanks, or what was still lacking to them which they were to ask for with perseverance. There are some who hear the words of the Law, 'Thou shalt not covet,'¹¹ in such wise as to imagine that their knowledge suffices for them without believing they should ask that strength be given them, by the help of God's grace, to enable them to do what is commanded; and what was said to the Jews applies to them: 'The law entered in that sin might abound.'¹² It is bad enough for them not to do what the Law commands: 'Thou shalt not covet,' but over and above they are so proud that 'not knowing the justice of God,' that is, what God gives in order to justify the wicked, 'and seeking to establish their own,' as if it rested on the strength of their own will, 'have not submitted themselves to the justice of God,' 'for the end of the law is Christ unto justice to everyone that believeth.'¹³ But He certainly came 'that where sin abounded, grace might more abound.'¹⁴ If the Jews were enemies to this grace, 'not knowing the justice of God, and seeking to establish their own,' why are these friends of yours hostile to it if they have believed in Him whom the Jews put to death? Could it be that the Jews who confessed their sin in killing Christ and submitted to His grace when it was made known to them receive their reward,

9 1 Cor. 10.13.

10 Cf. Isa. 8.20 (Septuagint); 1 Tim. 1.8.

11 Exod. 20.17; Deut. 5.21; 7.25; Rom. 7.7; 13.9.

12 Rom. 5.20.

13 Rom. 10.3,4.

14 Cf. Rom. 5.20.

while these of whom you speak will suffer judgment because they are willing to believe in Christ, but are trying to destroy His grace?

Those who believe in Him as they should believe for this purpose, that they may hunger and thirst after justice and be fully sated with His grace. For it is written: 'Everyone that shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'¹⁵ Obviously, this does not mean physical safety, which many enjoy without calling on the name of the Lord; it means that safety of which He Himself says: 'They that are in health need not a physician but they that are ill,' and He follows with a subsequent explanation of what He had said, by saying: 'I am not come to call the just, but sinners.'¹⁶ Therefore, by those in health He means the just, and those that are ill are the sinners. Let the sick man, then, not presume on his own strength, because 'he shall not be saved by his great strength.'¹⁷ If he does presume on it, let him discover that his strength is not such as well people usually have, but such as men have in delirium, who, although out of their minds, imagine themselves in such good health that they do not consult a physician, and even fall upon him with blows as an intruder. In the same way, these erroneous thinkers, with their mad pride, fall upon Christ with blows, so to speak, because they have no need of the kindly help of His grace to do justice according to the prescriptions of the Law. Let them, then, leave off this madness and understand, as far as they are able, that they have free will, not to despise the Lord's help with proud heart, but to call upon Him with a loving heart.

This free will will be free in proportion as it is sound, and sound in proportion as it is submissive to divine mercy and grace. Therefore, it prays with faith and says: 'Direct my

¹⁵ Joel 2.32; Acts 2.21; Rom. 10.13.

¹⁶ Matt. 9.12,13; Mark 2.17; Luke 5.31,32.

¹⁷ Ps. 32.16.

paths according to thy word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me.¹⁸ It prays, it does not promise; it confesses, it does not declare itself; it begs for the fullest liberty, it does not boast of its own power. It is not everyone who trusts in his own strength, but everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord who will be saved. 'How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?'¹⁹ Therefore, those who believe rightly, believe that they may call on Him in whom they have believed, and may be strong to do what they have learned in the precepts of the Law, since faith obtains what the Law commands.

To pass over for the present many of the precepts of the Law, and refer to the one which the Apostle chose to recall, when the Law says: 'Thou shalt not covet,' what else does it seem to command but restraint from unlawful passions? The mind, indeed, is carried along by love as by a weight, but wherever it is carried we are ordered to withdraw from the weight of passion what is to be added to the weight of love, until the one has disappeared and the other is completed, for 'love is the fulfilling of the law.'²⁰ Yet see, now, what is written of that restraint: 'And as I knew,' he says, 'that no one can be continent except God give it, and this also was a point of wisdom to know whose gift it was, I went to the Lord and besought him.'²¹ Did he then say: 'And as I knew that no one can be continent except by his own free will, and this was a point of wisdom to know that I could be good of myself?' Most certainly he did not say that, as some say it in their vanity, but he said what was to be said in the truth of holy Scripture: 'As I knew that no one can be continent except God give it.' Therefore, God commands continence

18 Ps. 118.133.

19 Rom. 10.14.

20 Rom. 13.10.

21 Cf. Wisd. 8.21.

and He gives continence; He commands by the Law, He gives by His grace; He commands by the letter, He gives by the spirit; for the Law without grace makes sin abound,²² and the letter without the spirit killeth.²³ He commands so as to make us learn how to ask the help of grace when we try to obey His commandments, and in our weakness fall wearied under the Law, and also to make us grateful to Him who helps us if we have been able to perform any good work. This is what the sacred writer did, this is what wisdom taught him: whose gift it was.

The freedom of the will is not destroyed by being helped, it is rather helped because it is not destroyed. He who says to God: 'Be thou my helper,'²⁴ confesses that he wishes to carry out what is commanded, but asks help of Him who gave the command so that he may be able to do it. Thus, also, when the sacred writer knew that no one can be continent except God gives it, he went to the Lord and besought Him. Obviously, he went freely and besought Him freely; he would not have made his prayer if he had not had the will to do so. But, if he had not prayed, how much would his will have been able to do? And if he is able before he asks, what good it is to him if he does not give thanks that he is able to Him from whom He must ask help for what he is not able to do? Thus, he who is now continent certainly does not possess continency unless his will assents to it, but, unless he had received it, what opportunity would there be for his will to act? 'What hast thou,' says the Apostle, 'that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?'²⁵ that is, 'Why do you glory as if you have by yourself what you could not

²² Rom. 5.20.

²³ 2 Cor. 3.6.

²⁴ Ps. 26.9.

²⁵ 1 Cor. 4.7.

have by yourself if you had not received it?' But this was written that 'he that glorieth may glory in the Lord,'²⁶ not in himself, and that he that has nothing yet of which he may glory may pray to the Lord, not hope in himself. It is better for a man to have a lesser good which he asks of the Lord than to have a greater one which he attributes to himself, since it is more advantageous to rise from the depths than to fall from the heights; for it is written: 'God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.'²⁷ Therefore, in view of the frequency of sin, the Law teaches us what we ought to wish if grace were not available to help us, that we may be able to carry out what we wish and to bring to a conclusion what we are able to do. Grace will help us if we do not rely on our own strength, 'not minding high things, but consenting to the humble,'²⁸ if we give thanks for what we are now able to do, and if, with eager will, we humbly beg God for help in what we are not able to do, supporting our prayer by the fruitful works of mercy, giving that it may be given to us, and forgiving that we may be forgiven.²⁹

Regarding the objection that an unbaptized infant, cut off by death, cannot be lost because it is born without sin,³⁰ the Apostle does not say this, and I think it is better to believe an Apostle than to believe those objectors. For the teacher of the Gentiles, in whom Christ speaks,³¹ says this: 'By one man, sin entered into the world and by sin death, and so, death passed upon all men in whom all have sinned,' and a little further he says: 'For judgment, indeed, was by one unto condemnation, but grace is of many offenses unto justification.'³² Therefore, if these men have found an infant not

26 1 Cor. 1.31; 2 Cor. 10.17.

27 James 4.6.; 1 Peter 5.5.

28 Rom. 12.16.

29 Cf. Luke 6.37,38; 11.4.

30 Letter 146.

31 2 Cor. 13.3.

32 Rom. 5.12,16.'

begotten of the concupiscence of that first man, let them say that it is not subject to damnation and has no need of being delivered from that damnation by the grace of Christ. But, what does he mean by 'one sin unto condemnation' if not the sin by which Adam fell? And what does he mean by 'of many offenses unto justification' except that the grace of Christ sets us free not only from that one sin under which infants, descended from the first man, are bound, but also from the many sins which men, grown up, add to that one by reason of their perverted character? Yet he also says that the one sin by which the children of his flesh are bound, which owes its origin to the first man, suffices for condemnation. Therefore, the baptism of infants is not useless, but its purpose is that those who are bound over to condemnation by their human birth may be set free from the same condemnation by their spiritual rebirth. Thus, as it is impossible to find a man carnally born outside Adam's line, so no man is found spiritually reborn outside the grace of Christ. Carnal birth is subject to that first sin and its damnation, spiritual rebirth destroys not only that first sin—and that is why infants are baptized—but also the many other offenses which men, by their evil lives, have added to that one in which they were born. Therefore, the Apostle continues and says: 'For if by one man's offense death hath reigned through one, much more they who receive abundance of grace and of justice shall reign in life through one Jesus Christ. Therefore, as by the offense of one unto all men to condemnation, so also by the justice of one unto all men to justification of life. For as by the disobedience of one man many were made sinners, so also by the obedience of one many shall be made just.'³³

What will those objectors have to say to that? Or what is left them to do but claim that the Apostle was in error? The vessel of election, the teacher of the Gentiles, the trumpet

33 Rom. 5.17-19.

of Christ cries out: 'Judgment by one unto condemnation,' and they cry back, insisting that children who derive their origin—as they admit—from that first man of whom he speaks do not go into condemnation, even if they have not been baptized in Christ. 'Judgment,' he says, 'by one unto condemnation.' What does he mean by 'one' but 'offense'? For he continues: 'Grace is of many offenses, unto justification.' Therefore, on the one hand, judgment leads from one offense to condemnation, but, on the other, grace leads from many offenses unto justification. Consequently, if they do not dare to resist the Apostle, let them expound for us why judgment leads from one offense unto condemnation, although men come to the judgment of condemnation from many sins. But, if they think this was said because the beginning of such sin occurred in Adam, and other men imitated it, so that those who committed many sins by imitating him were thus drawn into judgment and condemnation, why was the same thing not said of grace and justification? For, as many sins of men are found to have intervened between that one which they imitated and the judgment by which they are punished—obviously, they came from the one to the many that they might be led from the many to judgment—so, in like manner, there are many sins intervening between that same in imitation of which they were committed and the grace by which they are forgiven, since from that one they came to many, that from many they might come to the grace of justification. Therefore, as one and the same argument is used for both cases—that of judgment and that of grace—and as it applies both to one and to many offenses, let them tell us why he said that judgment leads from one offense unto condemnation, but grace from many offenses unto justification, or let them agree that this form of speech was used because in this case there is question of two men: Adam, the source of our carnal birth, and Christ, the source of our

spiritual rebirth. Now, because the former was only man, but the latter both God and Man, the spiritual rebirth does not release us from the one sin only which is of Adam, in the same way as our natural birth binds us under that one sin which is of Adam; it is enough for our condemnation that our natural birth have a connection with that one offense—for, whatever addition men make afterward by their evil deeds is not a consequence of their birth but of their human conduct—whereas this rebirth is not satisfied with releasing us from that one sin only, which is derived from Adam; it applies also to whatever evil deeds are added in consequence of human conduct. Therefore, ‘judgment was by one unto condemnation, but grace is of many offenses unto justification.’

If, then, ‘by one man’s offense death reigned through one’—the sin from which children are released by baptism—‘much more they who receive abundance of grace and of justice shall reign in life through one Jesus Christ,’ much more indeed shall they reign in life because it will be the reign of eternal life; while death passes over them in time, it will not reign forever. Therefore, ‘as by the offense of one unto all men to condemnation,’ from which condemnation children are to be set free by the sacrament of baptism, ‘so also by the justice of one unto all men to justification of life.’ In both places he says ‘all,’ not because all men actually come to the grace of justification in Christ, since so many turn away from Him and meet eternal death, but because all who are reborn to justification are reborn only in Christ, just as all who are born to condemnation are born only in Adam. On the side of birth there is no one but Adam, on the side of rebirth there is no one but Christ, and that is why he says ‘all’ both times; afterwards, he calls the same ‘all’ ‘many’ when he adds: ‘As by the disobedience of one man, many were made sinners, so also by the obedience of one man many

are made just.' Who are these 'many' except those whom a little before he called 'all'?

Notice how he emphasizes 'one' and 'one,' that is, Adam and Christ, the former for condemnation, the latter for justification, since Christ came so long after Adam to make us know that even those good men of old, whoever they might have been, could be ransomed only by the same faith by which we also are ransomed, namely, faith in the Incarnation of Christ, which was foretold to them as it is proclaimed to us. Therefore, in this place he calls Christ man, although He is also God, to prevent anyone from thinking that those good men of old could have been ransomed by Christ as God only, that is, by the Word, which was in the beginning,³⁴ and not also by faith in His Incarnation, by which Christ is also called Man. Naturally, that statement cannot be erased which he makes in another place: 'By one man came death and by one man the resurrection from the dead; for as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive.'³⁵ Obviously, he is speaking of the resurrection of the just where there is life eternal, not of the resurrection of the wicked where there will be eternal death, and that is why he says 'shall be made alive,' because the others will be damned. For this reason, too, among ancient rites the circumcision of children was prescribed to be performed on the eighth day,³⁶ because Christ, by whom carnal sin was despoiled of its empire, which circumcision signified, rose again on Sunday, which is the eighth day following the seventh or sabbath. This, then, was the faith of the good men of old. Hence, the Apostle also says: 'Having the same spirit of faith, as it is written: I believed, for which cause I have spoken: we also

³⁴ John 1.1.

³⁵ 1 Cor. 15.21,22.

³⁶ Gen. 17.12; Lev. 12.3.

believe for which cause we speak also.³⁷ He would not have said 'the same spirit of faith' if he did not wish to warn us that those good men of old had that same spirit of faith, that is, in the Incarnation of Christ. To them, however, this was foretold as something about to come, while to us it is proclaimed as something accomplished; in the time of the Old Testament it was veiled, in the time of the New it is revealed; consequently, the rites in both were different, so that the Old Testament had one kind, the New another, yet faith itself, which is true, does not vary because, 'as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive.'

After those words on which we have been commenting, he continues and says: 'Now the law entered in that sin might abound,'³⁸ but this does not apply to the sin which is derived from Adam, of which he said above: 'Death reigned through one.' Clearly, we must understand by it either the natural law which was known in those ages among all who had the use of reason, or the written Law which was given by Moses, but which could not give life nor set man free 'from the law of sin and death'³⁹ which came down from Adam; rather, it added an increase of transgression: 'For where there is no law,' says the same Apostle, 'neither is there transgression.'⁴⁰ Since there is a law in man's reason, written by nature in the heart of everyone who enjoys the use of free will, and this law suggests that a man do no evil to another which he would not wish to suffer himself, therefore, according to this law all are transgressors, even those who have not received the Law given by Moses, of whom the Psalmist says: 'I have accounted all the sinners of the earth prevaricators.'⁴¹ Not all the sin-

³⁷ 2 Cor. 4.13; Ps. 115.10.

³⁸ Rom. 5.20.

³⁹ Rom. 8.2.

⁴⁰ Rom. 4.15.

⁴¹ Ps. 118.119.

ners of the earth have transgressed against the Law given by Moses, but unless they had committed some transgression they would not be called prevaricators, 'for where there is no law, neither is there transgression.' Therefore, since the transgression against the law given in Paradise, man is born of Adam with the law of sin and death, of which it is said: 'I see another law in my members fighting against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that is in my members.'⁴² This latter law is easily kept in bonds unless it is strengthened by evil habit, yet not without the grace of God. But, all the sinners of the earth become prevaricators by transgressing against the other law which is found in the faculty of reason of the rational soul in all who have attained the age of reason. However, when there is transgression against the Law which was given by Moses, sin abounds much more: 'For if there had been a law given which could give life, verily justice should have been by the law. But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin that the promise by the faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.'⁴³ These are the words, if you recognize them, of an Apostle. Of the same law he says again: 'The law was set because of transgression, until the seed should come to whom he made the promise being ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.'⁴⁴ He thus gave praise to Christ by whose grace all are saved, whether they be children saved from the law of sin and death under which we are born, or adults who, by making a bad use of their freedom of will, have transgressed against the natural law of their own reason, or those who have received the Law given by Moses, have transgressed against it, and have been killed by the letter.'⁴⁵ But when a man

⁴² Rom. 7.23.

⁴³ Gal. 3.21,22.

⁴⁴ Gal. 3.19.

⁴⁵ 2 Cor. 3.6.

transgresses against the commandments of the Gospel, he stinks like a man four days dead.⁴⁶ Yet we are not to despair even of him, because of the grace of Him who said, not in a low voice but with a loud cry: 'Lazarus, come forth.'⁴⁷

Therefore, 'the law entered in that sin might abound,' either when men leave undone what God commands or when they rely on their own strength and do not ask the help of grace, thereby adding pride to their weakness. But when, by divine inspiration, they understand to whom they must cry for help, they call upon Him in whom they truly believe, saying: 'Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy,'⁴⁸ and: 'I said, O Lord, be thou merciful to me, heal my soul for I have sinned against thee,'⁴⁹ and: 'Quicken me in thy justice,'⁵⁰ and: 'Remove from me the way of iniquity and out of thy law have mercy on me,'⁵¹ and: 'Let not the foot of pride come to me and let not the hand of the sinner move me,'⁵² and: 'Direct my steps according to thy word and let no iniquity have dominion over me,'⁵³ for 'With the Lord shall the steps of a man be directed and he shall like well his way,'⁵⁴ and many other passages which were written to encourage us to accomplish what is commanded us and to ask help of Him by whom they are commanded. So, then, when man reaches out to Him and entreats Him thus, there will be a fulfillment of what follows: 'Where sin abounded grace did more abound,'⁵⁵ and: 'Many sins are forgiven her because she hath loved much,'⁵⁶ and: 'the charity of God is poured forth in our

46 John 11.39.

47 John 11.43.

48 Ps. 50.3.

49 Ps. 40.5.

50 Ps. 118.40.

51 Ps. 118.29.

52 Ps. 35.12.

53 Ps. 118.133.

54 Ps. 36.23; Prov. 20.24.

55 Rom. 5.20.

56 Luke 7.47.

hearts,' that love may be the 'fulfilling of the law,' not by the strength of will which is in us, 'but by the Holy Ghost who is given to us.'⁵⁷ The one who said: 'I am delighted with the law of God according to the inward man' certainly knew that law, yet he added: 'But I see another law in my members fighting against the law of my mind and making me captive in the law of sin; that is in my members. Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? The grace of God by Jesus Christ our Lord.'⁵⁸ Why did he not say, instead, 'my free will,' except that liberty without the grace of God is not liberty but inflexible arrogance?

Thus, when the Apostle had said: 'The law entered in that sin might abound, but where sin abounded grace did more abound,' he said afterward: 'That as sin hath reigned in death, so grace might reign through justice unto life everlasting through Jesus Christ our Lord.'⁵⁹ However, when he said: 'As sin hath reigned in death,' he did not say 'through one man' or 'through the first man' or 'through Adam,' because this abundance of sin is not the consequence of our descent from the first man, but of the perversity of our human conduct. In our mature years it is added out of the abundance of iniquity to that first sin by which alone infants are bound. But the grace of the Saviour is adequate to release us from all sin, even that which cannot be referred to the one, original sin; consequently, when he had said: 'so grace might reign through justice unto life everlasting,' he added: 'through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

Therefore, let no arguments pronounced against the words of the Apostle keep children from the salvation which is in Christ Jesus our Lord; rather, the less they are able to speak

⁵⁷ Rom. 13.10; 5.5.

⁵⁸ Rom. 7.22-25.

⁵⁹ Rom. 5.20,21.

for themselves, the more ought we to speak for them. 'By one man sin entered into this world, and by sin death, and thus it passed upon all men in whom all have sinned.'⁶⁰ As infants cannot help being descended from Adam, so they cannot help being touched by the same sin, unless they are set free from its guilt by the baptism of Christ. 'For until the law sin was in the world.' This was not intended to mean that thereafter there was not any sin in anyone; it means that it could not be taken away by the letter of the Law but only by the spirit of grace. That no one may trust in the strength—I do not say of his own will, but, rather, of his own vanity—and that no one may think the Law is enough for his free will and thus make light of the grace of Christ, the Apostle said: 'Until the law sin was in the world, but sin was not imputed when the law was not.'⁶¹ He did not say 'sin was not,' but 'sin was not imputed,' because the law was not, and by this statement he shows either the law of reason in the child or the law of the letter among men.

'But,' he says, 'death reigned from Adam unto Moses,' because the Law given by Moses could not do away with the reign of death: only the grace of Christ has done away with that. And note those over whom it will reign: 'Even over them also,' he says, 'who have not sinned after the similitude of the transgression of Adam.'⁶² Therefore, it has reigned even over those who have not sinned. But he shows why it reigned when he says: 'After the similitude of the transgression of Adam.' That is the better interpretation of these words, which makes him add to the statement: 'Death hath reigned even over them that have not sinned'—as if to make us know why it has reigned over those who have not sinned—'after the similitude of the transgression of Adam,' that is,

⁶⁰ Rom. 5.12.

⁶¹ Rom. 5.13.

⁶² Rom. 5.14.

because there was in their members a similitude of the transgression of Adam. It can also be understood thus: 'Death reigned from Adam unto Moses, even over them also who have not sinned, after the similitude of the transgression of Adam,' because when they were born they did not have in themselves the use of reason, which he had when he sinned. They would not have received the commandment which he transgressed, but would be bound only by the original guilt, through which the kingdom of death would drag them to condemnation. But the kingdom of death is not in those who are reborn by the grace of Christ and who belong to His kingdom, since their temporal death, although it is inherited as a consequence of original sin, kills the body in them but does not bring punishment upon their soul, which is what he wishes us to understand by the kingdom of death. The soul, renewed by grace, does not suffer death in hell, that is, it is not estranged, not separated from the life of God, while the temporal death of the body which occurs even in those who are redeemed by the death of Christ is left in force for a while as a test of faith and as a contest in our present struggle. Even the martyrs have taken part in this combat, but it wears away by the very renewal of the body which is promised at the resurrection. There, death will be completely swallowed up in victory,⁶³ when the grace of Christ takes away its kingdom, lest it draw down the souls of His redeemed into the pains of hell. It is true, some versions of the Scripture do not have: 'over them who have not sinned,' but: 'over them that have sinned after the similitude of the transgression of Adam'; but the sense is not destroyed by those words. According to this version, it is understood that they have sinned 'after the similitude of the transgression of Adam,' in the sense of what was said above: 'in whom all have sinned.' However, the Greek versions, from which the

63 1 Cor. 15.54.

Scripture was translated into Latin—those that have what we quoted above—are more numerous.

He added to his words about Adam: 'who is a figure of him who was to come,'⁶⁴ and this is not to be understood in only one way, either. For, either he is a figure of Christ in reverse, that is, as in him all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive, and 'as by his disobedience many were made sinners, so also by the obedience of Christ many shall be made just';⁶⁵ or the Apostle said that Adam was the figure of what was to come because he inflicted the form of death on his posterity. The former is the better interpretation, that he should be regarded as a figure in reverse, and this the Apostle highly commends. Finally, lest opposites should be weighed in exactly the same balance in this figure, he continues and says: 'But not as the offense so also the gift, for if by the offense of one many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many.'⁶⁶ We are to understand by this not 'unto many more,' since the wicked who will be damned are many more, but 'hath abounded much more,' because over those who are redeemed by Christ the form of death derived from Adam has a temporary dominion, but the form of life bestowed by Christ will have dominion over them forever. Therefore, he says, although Adam is the figure in reverse of Him that is to come, the good done by Christ to the regenerated is greater than the harm done by Adam to his descendants. 'And not as it was by one sin, so also is the gift, for judgment indeed was by one unto condemnation, but grace is of many offenses unto justification.'⁶⁷ Not only in this, he says, is the figure inexact, that Adam inflicted a temporal injury on those whom Christ

64 Rom. 5.14.

65 Rom. 5.19.

66 Rom. 5.5.

67 Rom. 5.16.

redeemed for eternity, but also in that his posterity, as a result of that one sin, are involved in his condemnation unless they are redeemed by Christ; but the redemption of Christ has also forgiven the many offenses which man has added to that one because of the abundance of sinful iniquity. But we have treated of this above.

If you wish to live for Christ and in Christ, you must not agree with anyone who contradicts these words of the Apostle and this same interpretation. If, as they say, the Apostle had made this statement to have us understand that sinners are the progeny of the first man because we sin by imitating him, not because we inherit sin by being born of him, he should rather have adduced the Devil, who was the first sinner, from whom the human race derives no inheritance of substance, but whom it has followed solely by imitation. This is why he is called the father of sinners, as Abraham is called 'our father'⁶⁸ because we imitate him in his faith, not because he is our progenitor in the flesh. Therefore it is said of the Devil: 'They follow him that are of his side.'⁶⁹ In the next place, if the Apostle mentioned the first man in this passage because he was the first sinner among men, and if he meant thereby that all men who are sinners belong to him, why did he not bring in holy Abel, who was the first just man among mankind, and claim that all just men belong to him through imitation of his justice? But he did bring in Adam, against whom he could set no one but Christ, because, as the first man attained his posterity by his sin, so the God-Man saved His inheritance by His own justice; the one brought on corruption of the flesh, which the Devil for all his wickedness could not do; the other gave the grace of the Spirit, which Abel, the just, could not do.

We have spoken extensively of these questions in other

⁶⁸ John 8.44.

⁶⁹ Wisd. 2.25.

works of ours⁷⁰ and in sermons in church, because there have been some among us who were trying to sow the seeds of their new error wherever they could, but the mercy of the Lord, through our ministry and that of our brothers, has cured some of them of that disease. In spite of that, I think there are some here, and especially at Carthage, who still mutter about it, but not openly, because they fear the solid foundation of the Church's faith. One of them, named Caelestius,⁷¹ had begun a stealthy approach to the dignity of priesthood in a church of that same city, but the free and faithful action of the brothers brought him before the bishop's tribunal because of his arguments against the grace of Christ.⁷² However, he was obliged to admit that baptism is necessary for infants because they stand in need of redemption, and, although reluctant to make any definite statement about original sin, he made considerable exceptions from the term 'redemption.' But, what were they to be redeemed from if not the power of the Devil, and how could they have been subject to it except through original sin? And at what price are they redeemed but by the Blood of Christ, of which it is most clearly written that it was shed for the remission of sins?⁷³ As he went away convicted and reprobated by the Church, rather than corrected and reconciled, I fear that he may be among you and may attempt to undermine your faith. That is why I thought well to mention him by name. But whether he or some partners of his error are with you—for they are too numerous to make it possible for us to hope they are not, and when they are not refuted they mislead others into their sect and increase so much that I do not know where

70 Letter 140; *De gratia; De peccatorum meritis et remissione; De baptismo parvulorum.*

71 His followers, called Celestines, were condemned at the Synod of Ephesus in 431.

72 In 411 or 412; cf. Orosius, *Liber apologeticus* 3.4 (CSEL 5.606-609).

73 Matt. 26.28.

they will break out next—we would rather see them cured in the body of the Church than cut off from that body as rotten members, if necessity allows even that. We have to fear that others will be infected, if we spare their infection. But, the mercy of our Lord is able rather to free them from this disease, and no doubt He will do it if they note and hold faithfully to what is written: 'Whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'⁷⁴

Listen, now, to something about riches in answer to the next inquiry in your letter. In it you wrote that some are saying that a rich man who continues to live rich cannot enter the kingdom of heaven unless he sells all he has, and that it cannot do him any good to keep the commandments while he keeps his riches. Their arguments have overlooked our fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who departed long ago from this life. It is a fact that all these had extensive riches, as the Scripture faithfully bears witness, yet He who became poor for our sakes, although He was truly rich,⁷⁵ foretold in a truthful promise that many would come from the east and the west and would sit down not above them, nor without them, but with them in the kingdom of heaven.⁷⁶ Although the haughty rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen and feasted sumptuously every day, died and was tormented in hell, nevertheless, if he had shown mercy to the poor man covered with sores who lay at his door and was treated with scorn, he himself would have deserved mercy. And if the poor man's merit had been his poverty, not his goodness, he surely would not have been carried by angels into the bosom of Abraham who had been rich in this life. This is intended to show us that on the one hand it was not poverty in itself that was divinely honored, nor, on the other,

⁷⁴ Joel 2.32.

⁷⁵ 2 Cor. 8.9.

⁷⁶ Matt. 8.11.

riches that were condemned, but that the godliness of the one and the ungodliness of the other had their own consequences, and, as the torment of fire was the lot of the ungodly rich man, so the bosom of the rich Abraham received the godly poor man. Although Abraham lived as a rich man, he held his riches so lightly and thought them of so little worth in comparison with the commandments of God that he would not offend God by refusing to sacrifice, at His bidding, the very individual whom he had hoped and prayed for as the heir of his riches.⁷⁷

At this point they probably say that the patriarchs of old did not sell all they had and give it to the poor, because the Lord had not commanded it. The New Testament had not yet been revealed, as it was fitting it should not be until the fullness of time had come,⁷⁸ so neither was it fitting that their virtue should be revealed, yet God knew that they could easily exercise this virtue interiorly, and He bore such striking witness to them that, although He is the God of all the saints and of all just men, He deigned to speak of them as His particular friends: 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob: this is my name forever.'⁷⁹ But, after 'the great mystery of godliness was manifested in the flesh,'⁸⁰ and the coming of Christ was made visible by the calling of all nations—and the patriarchs, too, had believed in Him but had preserved the faith, so to speak, in the root of the olive tree, of which the fruit was to be manifested in its own time, as the Apostle says⁸¹—then, the rich man was told: 'Sell all whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.'⁸²

77 Gen. 22.1-10.

78 Gal. 4.4; Eph. 1.10.

79 Exod. 3.15.

80 1 Tim. 3.16.

81 Rom. 11.17.

82 Matt. 19.21; Mark 10.21; Luke 18.22.

If they say this, they seem to speak with reason. But they should hear and take account of the whole, not open their ears to half of it and close them to the other half. To whom did the Lord give this commandment? Why, to the rich man who was asking His advice on how to receive eternal life, for he had said to the Lord: 'What shall I do that I may receive life everlasting?'⁸³ He did not answer him: 'If thou wilt enter into life, sell all that thou hast,' but: 'If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.' And when the young man said that he had kept the commandments which the Lord had quoted to him from the Law, and asked what was still lacking to him, he received this answer: 'If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell all that thou hast and give to the poor.' And, lest he might think he was losing what he so dearly loved, He said: 'And thou shalt have treasure in heaven.' Then He added: 'And come, follow me,' that no one who might do this should think it would bring him any reward unless he followed Christ. But the young man went away sad, so anyone can see how he kept those commandments of the Law, for I think he spoke with more pride than truth when he answered that he had kept them. However, it is a fact that the good Master distinguished between the commandments of the Law and that higher perfection; for in the one place He said: 'If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments,' but in the other: 'If wilt be perfect, sell all thou hast,' and the rest. Why, then, do we refuse to admit that the rich, although far from that perfection, nevertheless enter into life if they keep the commandments, and give that it may be given to them, forgive that they may be forgiven?⁸⁴

We believe that the Apostle Paul was the minister of the New Testament when he wrote to Timothy, saying: 'Charge the rich of this world not to be high-minded, nor to trust in

⁸³ Matt. 19.16-22; Mark 10.17-22; Luke 18.18-23.

⁸⁴ Luke 6.38,37.

the uncertainty of riches: but in the living God who giveth us abundantly all things to enjoy. To do good, to be rich in good works, to give easily, to communicate to others. To lay up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on the true life,⁸⁵ in the same way as it was said to the young man: 'If thou wilt enter into life.' I think that, when he gave those instructions to the rich, the Apostle was not wrong in not saying: 'Charge the rich of this world to sell all they have, give to the poor and follow the Lord,' instead of: 'Not to be high-minded, nor to trust in the uncertainty of riches.' It was his pride, not his riches, that brought the rich man to the torments of hell, because he despised the good poor man who lay at his gate, because he put his hope in the uncertainty of riches, and thought himself happy in his purple and fine linen and sumptuous banquets.

But, perhaps, because the Lord continued and said: 'Amen, I say to you that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you: it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven,'⁸⁶ they think that, even if a rich man does the things which the Apostle prescribed for the rich, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven? What is the answer? Does the Apostle contradict the Lord, or do they not know what they say? Let the Christian choose which he will believe; I think it is better for us to believe that they do not know what they say than that Paul contradicts the Lord. Again, why do they not listen to the subsequent words of the Lord Himself to His disciples, who were cast down at the wretched state of the rich: 'What is impossible for men is easy for God'?⁸⁷

85 1 Tim. 6.17-19.

86 Matt. 19.23,24; Mark 10.24,25; Luke 18.24,25.

87 Matt. 19.25,26; Mark 10.26,27; Luke 19.26,27.

But, they say, this was said because it was going to happen that, hearing the Gospel, the rich would sell their inheritance, distribute it to the poor, follow the Lord, and so enter into the kingdom of heaven; what seemed difficult would thus come to pass. It did not mean, according to them, that those who retained their riches, even though they kept the Apostle's precepts of not being high-minded, not trusting in the uncertainty of riches, but in the living God, of doing good, giving easily, and communicating to the needy, would thus lay hold on the true life, unless they carried out these apostolic directions by selling all their goods.

If they say this—and I know they do say it—they do not notice, in the first place, how the Lord preached His grace, in contradiction to their teaching. He did not say: 'What seems impossible for men is easy for men if they will it,' but He said: 'What is impossible for men is easy for God,' showing that when those actions are rightly performed they are not done by the power of man, but by the grace of God. Let them, then, take note of this, and, if they find fault with those who glory in their riches let them take care themselves not to trust in their own strength, for both are rebuked in the psalm: 'They that trust in their own strength and glory in the multitude of their riches.'⁸⁸ Let the rich hearken to this: 'What is impossible for men is easy for God,' and whether they retain riches and do their good works by means of them, or enter into the kingdom of heaven by selling them and distributing them to provide for the needs of the poor, let them attribute their good works to the grace of God, not to their own strength. What is impossible for men is easy, not for men, but for God. Let your friends hear that, and, if they have already sold all their goods and distributed them to the poor, or are still making plans and arrangements to do so, and in this way are preparing to enter into the kingdom of heaven, let

⁸⁸ Ps. 48.7.

them not attribute this to their own strength, but to the same divine grace. For, what is impossible for men is easy, not for them, because they are men, but for God. The Apostle also says this to them: 'With fear and trembling, work out your salvation. For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to accomplish, according to His good will.'⁸⁹ True, they say that by selling their goods they have followed the Lord's counsel of perfection, since it is there added: 'And come, follow me.' Why, then, in the good works which they do, do they rely entirely on their own will, and fail to hear the reproach and testimony of the Lord, whom they say they are following: 'Without me, you can do nothing'?⁹⁰

If, when the Apostle said: 'Charge the rich of this world not to be high-minded, nor to trust in the uncertainty of riches,' he meant that they should sell all they had and gain their reward by distributing it to the needy, then, in what follows: 'to give easily, to communicate to others, to lay up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come,' if he believed that otherwise they could not enter into the kingdom of heaven, he was deceiving those whose homes he so carefully set in order, warning and instructing how wives should behave to husbands and husbands to wives, sons to parents, parents to sons, servants to their masters, masters to servants;⁹¹ for how could any of this be done without a home and family possessions?

Were they influenced in this by the Lord's words: 'Every-one that hath left all things for my sake, shall receive an hundredfold in this time and in the world to come life everlasting'?⁹² There is a difference between 'hath left' and 'hath sold,' for, among those things which He commanded them to

⁸⁹ Phil. 2.12,13.

⁹⁰ John 15.5.

⁹¹ Eph. 5.22; 6.1-9; Col. 3.18; 4.1; 1 Peter 3.1-7; 2.18; 1 Cor. 7.3; Titus 2.9.

⁹² Matt. 19.29; Mark 10.29,30; Luke 18.29,30.

leave, even a wife is mentioned, yet human law does not allow a wife to be sold, nor does the law of Christ allow her to be put away except for fornication.⁹³ What, then, is the meaning of those precepts—for they cannot be contradictory—except that sometimes an extreme emergency might arise when either wife or Christ has to be put away, as, to pass over other instances, when a Christian husband has become unacceptable to a wife and she has offered him the choice of a separation from her or from Christ? What choice has he except to keep Christ and put away his wife, quite laudably, for the sake of Christ? But, when both are Christians, the Lord has commanded that no one shall put away his wife except for cause of fornication. On the other hand, when either one of the pair is an unbeliever, the advice of the Apostle is a guide: If an unbelieving wife consent to dwell with a believing husband, he should not put her away, and this same holds for a believing wife with her husband, if he consents to dwell with her. 'But,' he says, 'if the unbeliever depart, let him depart, for a brother or sister is not under servitude in such cases,'⁹⁴ that is, if the unbeliever refuses to stay with a believing spouse, let the believer recognize his own liberty, let him not consider himself under servitude, so as to give up the faith itself rather than lose an unbelieving spouse.

This is also to be understood of children and parents, as of brothers and sisters, that all are to be given up for Christ's sake, when the alternative is offered them of giving up Christ if they wish to have their kindred with them. Therefore, the same is to be applied in this passage to house and lands, as well as to those possessions which have a money value. At the same time, he did not say of these things, 'whoever shall sell for my sake' what it is plainly legitimate to sell, but 'everyone that hath left' them. It could happen that some public

⁹³ Matt. 5.32.

⁹⁴ 1 Cor. 7.12,13,15.

official would say to a Christian: 'Either you will stop being a Christian, or, if you persist in being one, you shall have no house or property.' That will be the time when those rich men, who had decided to keep their riches in order to win merit with God by using them for good works, will choose to give them up for Christ's sake rather than Christ for their sake, so as to receive the hundredfold in this world—a perfect number which signifies all things, 'for the faithful man the whole world is made up of riches,'⁹⁵ and thus they become as men 'having nothing, yet possessing all things'⁹⁶—and everlasting life in the world to come, lest by giving up Christ for the sake of riches they be cast into everlasting death.

It is clear that this obligation and state of life include not only those who have received the counsel of perfection with such excellent dispositions that they have sold their goods and distributed them to the poor, and, with their shoulders freed of every worldly burden, bear the light yoke of Christ,⁹⁷ but also the weaker soul, less capable of the glorious perfection, who nevertheless remembers that he is a Christian when he hears that he must give up Christ or lose all his possessions. He will rather lay hold on the 'tower of strength against the face of the enemy'⁹⁸ because, when he was building it by his faith, he reckoned the charges with which it could be completed,⁹⁹ that is, he embraced the faith with the intention of renouncing this world, not in word only, because, if he bought something he was as one not possessing it, and if he used this world he was as one not using it,¹⁰⁰ not placing his hope in the uncertainty of riches, but in the living God.¹⁰¹

Since everyone who renounces this world renounces without

95 Prov. 17.6 (Septuagint).

96 2 Cor. 6.10.

97 Matt. 11.30.

98 Ps. 60.4.

99 Luke 14.28.

100 1 Cor. 7.30,31.

101 1 Tim. 6.17.

question everything that is in it, that he may be the disciple of Christ—for, when He had pronounced the parable of the charges necessary for building a tower, and of the preparation for war of one king against another, He added: 'Whoever does not renounce all that he possesses cannot be my disciple'¹⁰²—naturally he renounces his riches, also, if he has any, either by not loving them and distributing them to the needy, thereby to be lightened of useless burdens, or by loving Christ more and transferring his hope from them to Him, so using them as to give easily, to communicate, to lay up a good store in heaven, and to be ready to give them up as he would his parents and children and wife if he were faced with the alternative of not having them unless he gave up Christ. For, if he renounces the world on any other terms when he draws near to the sacrament of faith,¹⁰³ he does what blessed Cyprian mourned over in the case of the lapsed, saying: 'They renounce the world in word only, not in deed.'¹⁰⁴ Surely it is to such a one, who at the approach of temptation is more afraid of losing his wealth than of denying Christ, that these words apply: 'Here is a man who began to build and was not able to finish.'¹⁰⁵ He is also the one who, while his adversary is yet afar off, sends an embassy desiring peace,¹⁰⁶ that is, at the approach and threat of temptation, before it hurts him, he agrees to give up Christ and deny Him rather than be deprived of what is dearer to him. And there are many such who even think that the Christian religion ought to help them to increase their riches and multiply earthly delights.

But this class does not include the rich Christians who, although they possess riches, are not possessed by them, because

¹⁰² Luke 14.33.

¹⁰³ I.e., baptism.

¹⁰⁴ Cyprian, *Ep.* 11.1 (ed. Hartel, p. 496).

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Luke 14.30.

¹⁰⁶ Luke 14.32.

they have renounced the world in truth and from their heart, and who put no hope in such possessions. These use a sound discipline in training their wives, their children, and their whole household to cling to the Christian religion; their homes, overflowing with hospitality, 'receive the just man in the name of a just man that they may receive the reward of a just man';¹⁰⁷ they deal their bread to the hungry, they clothe the naked,¹⁰⁸ they ransom the captive, 'to lay up in store for themselves a good foundation for the time to come that they may lay hold on the true life.'¹⁰⁹ If it happens that they have to suffer the loss of their money for the faith of Christ, they hate their riches; if this world threatens them with bereavement or with separation from their families, they hate their parents, brothers, children, wives; finally, if there is question of an agreement with their adversary about the very life of their body, they go so far as to hate their own life, rather than risk being forsaken by a forsaken Christ. The reason? Because on all these points they have received a commandment that they cannot otherwise be the disciples of Christ.

But this commandment that they must hate even their own life for the sake of Christ does not mean that they own it as something that can be sold, or that they can lay hands on themselves and destroy it, but that they are ready to lose it by dying for the name of Christ rather than live a dying life by denying Christ. In the same way, the riches which they were not ready to sell at the summons of Christ they must be ready to lose for Christ, lest by losing Christ they lose themselves with their riches. We have striking examples of this in the wealthy of both sexes raised on high by the glory of martyrdom. Thus, many who had previously shrunk from the perfection to be attained by selling their goods were sud-

107 Matt. 10.41.

108 Cf. Isa. 58.7; Matt. 25.35,36.

109 1 Tim. 6.19.

denly made perfect by imitating the Passion of Christ, and those who clung to their riches through the frailty of flesh and blood, when suddenly faced with sin, have resisted for the faith even unto blood. There are others who have not won the crown of martyrdom, who have not taken to heart the high and noble counsel of perfection by selling their goods, yet they are free of deeds deserving damnation; they have fed Christ hungry, given drink to Him thirsty, clothed Him naked, received Him a wanderer, and, although they will not sit with Christ on a throne when He comes to judge, they will stand at His right to receive the judgment of mercy:¹¹⁰ 'Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy,'¹¹¹ and 'Judgment without mercy to him that hath not done mercy, but mercy exalteth itself above judgment.'¹¹²

Henceforth, let those objectors cease to speak against the Scriptures; let them, in their sermons, encourage men to higher things without condemning lower ones. For, they are unable to preach holy virginity in their exhortations without condemning the marriage bond, although the Apostle teaches that 'everyone hath his proper gift from God, one after this manner, another after that.'¹¹³ Let them, then, walk in the path of perfection by selling all their goods and spending them on works of mercy, but, if they are truly the poor of Christ, and if they store up, not for themselves but for Christ, why should they pronounce punishment on His weaker members before they have attained to the seats of judgment? If they are the kind of men to whom the Lord says: 'You shall sit on twelve seats, judging the twelve tribes of Israel,'¹¹⁴ and of whom the Apostle says: 'Know you not that we shall judge angels?'¹¹⁵ let them rather make ready to receive into ever-

110 Matt. 25.34-46.

111 Matt. 5.7.

112 James 2.13.

113 1 Cor. 7.7.

114 Matt. 19.28; Luke 22.30.

115 1 Cor. 6.3.

lasting mansions, not the accursed, but the charitable rich who have made friends of them through the mammon of iniquity.¹¹⁶ I think that some of those who babble these ideas without restraint or reason are supported in their needs by rich and religious Christians. We may say that the Church has its own soldiers and its own provincial officers, of whom the Apostle says: 'Who serveth as a soldier at any time at his own charges?' It has its vineyard and its planters, its flock and its shepherds, of whom the Apostle goes on to say: 'Who planteth a vineyard and eateth not the fruit thereof? Who feedeth a flock and eateth not of the milk of the flock?'¹¹⁷ Yet, to offer such arguments as they offer would not be to serve as a soldier, but to revolt; it would not be to plant a vineyard, but to uproot it; it would not be to gather the flock for the pasture, but to drive the sheep from the flock to destruction.

As those who are fed and clothed at the expense of the charitable rich—for they accept nothing for their own necessities except from those who sell their goods—are not judged and condemned by the more perfect members of Christ who furnish their own needs with their own hands—a higher virtue which the Apostle strongly commends¹¹⁸—so they in turn ought not to condemn as Christians of lower grade those from whose resources they are supplied; but by right living and right teaching they rather should say to them: 'If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great matter if we reap your carnal things?'¹¹⁹ The servants of God who live by selling the honest works of their own hands could, with much less impropriety, condemn those from whom they receive nothing than could those others who are unable to work with their hands because of some bodily weakness, yet who condemn the very ones at whose expense they live.

116 Luke 16.9.

117 1 Cor. 9.7.

118 Acts 20.34; 1 Thess. 4.11.

119 1 Cor. 9.11.

I who write this have greatly loved the perfection of which the Lord spoke when He said to the rich young man: 'Go, sell what thou hast and give to the poor, and come, follow me,'¹²⁰ and I have acted upon it, not by my strength but by His helping grace, and I do not think that I shall have less merit because I was not rich, for the Apostles were not rich, either, and they were the first to practise it. But he who gives up both what he has and what he desires to have gives up the whole world. Better than any other man, I know how far I have progressed in this way of perfection, but God knows it better than I do. With all the influence I have I urge others to follow this counsel, and in the name of the Lord I have brothers who have been attracted to this life by my ministry. Yet, we follow it while holding to sound doctrine; we are not so presumptuous as to judge those who do not follow us, by saying that they gain no merit by living in the married state, however chastely, or by governing their homes and families in Christian fashion, or by laying up treasure for themselves against the time to come by works of mercy, lest by such statements we be found accusers of the holy Scriptures instead of expounders of them. My reason for mentioning this is that those objectors, when prevented from saying such things by men who have not followed this counsel of the Lord, answer that the latter do not want such arguments brought forward because they are indulging their own vices and withdrawing men from following the Lord's commands. I say nothing about those who make good use of their riches, though not too strong in their religion, but they would imply that even the very covetous and grasping who make a bad use of their wealth, setting their heart of clay on earthly treasure—whom, nevertheless, the Church is obliged to carry along to the end, as the net carries the bad fish as far as the shore¹²¹—that they

120 Matt. 19.21; Mark 10.21; Luke 18.22.

121 Matt. 13.47,48.

are not easier to endure than those wrong-headed men who preach and prate such doctrine, trying to make themselves seem great because they have sold their rich possessions or their insignificant little patrimony, according to the Lord's command, yet who are really working, by this unsound doctrine, to trouble and undermine His inheritance which is spread abroad and extended to the ends of the earth.

I have taken this occasion to express, however briefly, what I think about the Church of Christ in this world, namely, that the Church must necessarily carry along both good and bad to the end of this world—because you included this among your questions—but it is now high time for me to bring this long letter to a close.

Avoid swearing as far as possible. It is certainly better not even to swear to the truth than to form the habit of swearing, thereby often falling into perjury or being on the verge of falling into it. As for your objectors, such of them as I have heard, they do not know precisely what swearing is. They think they are not swearing when they use the words: 'God knows'¹²² and 'God is my witness'¹²³ and 'I call God to witness upon my soul,'¹²⁴ because they do not say 'By God' and because such expressions are found in the Apostle Paul. There is an expression to be found which refutes them and which they admit is an oath, where the Apostle says: 'I die daily, I protest by your glory, brethren, which I have in Christ Jesus, our Lord.'¹²⁵ In the Greek versions this is definitely understood as an oath and no one is to understand in Latin that these words, 'by your glory,' are said with the same meaning as 'by my coming to you again,'¹²⁶ and many such expressions where we say 'by something' without meaning to

122 2 Cor. 11.31; 12.2.

123 Rom. 1.9; Phil. 1.8.

124 2 Cor. 1.23.

125 1 Cor. 15.31.

126 Phil. 1.26.

swear. The fact that the Apostle, a man thoroughly steeped in the truth, used oaths in his letters is no reason why we should treat oaths lightly. It is much safer for us, as I said, never to swear at all, as far as it lies in us, and to have in our mouths the words, 'yea, yea, no, no,'¹²⁷ as the Lord advises; not that it is a sin to swear truthfully, but that it is a grievous sin to swear falsely, and the habit of swearing makes one fall quickly.

This is a statement for you of my views. Better men may give you a better explanation; not those whose opinion I now know is to be condemned, but others who can argue truthfully; for I am more eager to learn than to teach, and you will do me a great kindness if you will let me know what refutations are being made there by the holy brethren against this idle talk. May you live uprightly and happily in the Lord, my dearly loved son.

158. Evodius¹ and the brothers who are with me give greeting in the Lord to their venerated lord, beloved brother and fellow priest, Augustine, and the brothers who are with you (c. 415)

I insist on the letter you owe me in answer to the one I sent, and, first of all, I want to be instructed about the matter I submitted to you, and, next, to ask you about this one. I am in a hurry to know about this if it is possible to know it in this life. I had a certain youth as secretary, a son of the priest² Armenius of Melonita. As he was just beginning to mingle with the world—he was taking notes for a lecturer of the

¹²⁷ Matt. 5.37; James 5.12.

¹ Bishop of Uzala; cf. Letter 24 n. 16.

² It was not unusual at that time for a married man to be ordained priest.

governor—God rescued him through my lowly agency. In his boyhood he was quick and somewhat restless, but as he advanced in age—he had completed his twenty-second year—his virtuous life was adorned with such a dignified and reserved demeanor that it is a joy just to call it to mind. He was skillful in note-taking, and very exact in writing; he had also begun to be devoted to reading and used to rouse my slothfulness to read during the hours of the night. Sometimes he read to me at night when everything was quiet, and he would never pass over a reading which he did not understand, going over it three or four times, and not letting it go until his questions were clearly answered. I had begun to treat him not merely as a young secretary, but as an intimate and dear friend. His stories delighted me.

He also desired 'to be dissolved and to be with Christ,'³ and this was granted to him. He was sick for sixteen days at his parents' home, and, being fully conscious, spoke of the Scriptures throughout almost his whole illness. When he was nearing the end of his life he sang, in the hearing of all: 'My soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of God,'⁴ and after that he again sang: 'Thou hast anointed my head with oil, and thy chalice that inebriateth how goodly it is!'⁵ That was his occupation, that was his consolation and delight. Then, when he began to fail, he tried to make the Sign of the Cross on his forehead and brought his hand down to his mouth on which he also wanted to make the sign, because now the inward man, being fully renewed day by day,⁶ had quit its house of clay.⁷ I was filled with such joy that I thought he had entered into my mind after leaving his own body, and was there spreading a brightness as a sign of his presence. I can-

³ Phil. 1.23.

⁴ Ps. 83.3.

⁵ Ps. 22.5.

⁶ 2 Cor. 4.16.

⁷ Job 4.19.

not express my intense joy at his being free and safe, for I had experienced no slight anxiety on his account, fearing for his youth. I had taken care to inquire of him whether he had ever been defiled with a woman, and he bore witness that he was free of that taint, thereby augmenting my joy. So he was set free. We celebrated his obsequies solemnly, as became such a soul, for we praised the Lord with hymns for three days around his tomb, and on the third day we offered the sacrifice of redemption.

But lo and behold, two days later, a certain widow named Urbica, an honorable lady of Figes, who said she had been a widow for twelve years, had a dream like this: She saw a deacon, departed from the body four years ago, who, in company with servants and handmaids of God, virgins and widows, was preparing a palace. It was so beautifully adorned and the brightness of the place was such that you would think the whole place was of silver. When she asked very earnestly for whom the preparations were being made, the deacon answered that it was for the son of a priest, a young man who had been taken from the world yesterday. In the same palace there appeared an old man clothed in white who gave orders to two other white-clad ones to go, take the body from the tomb, and carry it up to heaven. And, she said, when the body had been taken from the tomb and raised up to heaven, branches of virgin roses—that is what unopened flowers are usually called—grew up from the same tomb.

I have told you what was related. Now, please listen to my question and explain what I ask. The flight of that soul makes me inquire into such things. When we are in the body, there is in us an interior consciousness, responsive to the quick changes of our desire; it is watchful and eager in proportion to our activity, yet it seems likely that we are held back by the obstacle of the body. Who could describe all that the mind suffers from the body? In the midst of these troubles and

annoyances, arising from suggestions, from temptations, from necessities and various afflictions, the mind does not forsake its own strength; it resists, it overcomes, sometimes it is overcome. Nevertheless, when it reflects on itself, it is roused by such efforts, it becomes more active and attentive, it breaks the knots of wickedness and wins through to better things. Your Holiness is kind enough to understand what I mean. Therefore, while we are in this life we are both weighed down by such needs, yet, as it is written: 'We overcome because of Him that hath loved us,'⁸ but, going out of the body and escaping from every burden and every actual sin, what are we?

In the first place, I ask whether there is any kind of body which does not leave behind an incorporeal something, such as the substance of the soul itself, when it leaves the earthly body, yet which is not either the airy or etherial one of the four elements. Since the soul is incorporeal, if it is entirely lacking in body, it is the same for all. And where will that rich man clothed in purple be, and where Lazarus covered with sores?⁹ How will they be distinguished according to their merits, so that one has pain, the other joy, if the soul has the same appearance among all incorporeal beings, and if those differences are not distinguished by any mark? It is certain that if they are contained in any places they are contained corporeally: the rich man in the flame and the poor one in Abraham's bosom. If there are places, there are bodies, and the incorporeal souls are in bodies; or, if the punishments and rewards are in the conscience, then that soul which is the same in each is made up of many souls and would experience both pain and joy in the one substance, which is apparently gathered from many souls. Or, if it is said that just as the incorporeal mind is one, and in it there is memory

8 Rom. 8.37.

9 Luke 16.19-22.

and will and understanding, and all these are incorporeal causes, and have their proper share of duties, yet they do not get in each other's way, I think it could certainly be answered that in like manner pains are the share of some souls and rewards of others, in the one substance gathered from many souls. But, if that is not it, I see no objection to saying that each mind has another body when it leaves this solid one, and so the mind always has a body to animate, and in it crosses over, if there is any place to which necessity compels it to go, since, indeed, the angels themselves cannot be enumerated if they are not counted by bodies, as Truth itself says in the Gospel: 'I could ask my Father to send me twelve legions of angels';¹⁰ and also since it is evident that Samuel was seen in the body when he was raised by the incantation of Saul,¹¹ and since it is clear, according to the Gospel, that Moses, whose body was buried, came to the Lord on the Mount when they stood together.¹² However, in the apocryphal and secret writings about this same Moses, which lack authority, it says that, when he went up the mountain to die, a physical effect was produced by which the body entrusted to the earth was not the same as the one which joined its angel companion. But I am not much inclined to offer the opinion of the apocrypha against those clearly defined truths given above. Let us see, then, whether this inquiry is to be pursued by authority or by reason.

It is said that the future resurrection proves that the soul has been entirely without a body. It is not a real objection that those angels who appeared to Abraham and Tobias¹³ were invisible corporeally, yet willed to appear and to be visible, and, whatever the external circumstance of their bodies, they were such as befit their spirits, though they were

¹⁰ Matt. 26.53.

¹¹ 1 Kings 28.14.

¹² Matt. 17.3.

¹³ Gen. 18.2; Tob. 12.15.

human. So it might be that the resurrection of the body, in which we rightly believe, will take place in such wise that the soul will be restored so as to show that it has never been entirely deprived of some kind of body. Since the body itself is composed of four elements, it seems to lose one, namely heat, when that seems to depart from the body. The earthly element remains, and moisture is not lacking; no other element is missing to that cold matter; heat alone has been withdrawn, which perhaps the soul takes with it if it moves from place to place. This will be enough to say at present about the body.

It also seems to me that if the soul is lodged in a body, as I said, it grows strong, it makes use of the untiring activity of the mind, and the lighter, quicker, stronger, more active, eager and intent it is, the more capable and the better it becomes; thus being joined to a body, it enjoys its own strength. But, when this body is laid aside, very much as a cloud is brushed away, it becomes wholly bright, established in peace, without temptation; it sees what it longs for, embraces what it loves and remembers its friends, both those who have gone before it and those it has left behind. Perhaps it is thus; I do not know, I seek to learn. But I find it a disturbing thought that the soul should be wrapped in a kind of sleep, that it becomes like one who sleeps while still in the body, as if buried, living only in hope, but doing nothing, knowing nothing, especially if it is untouched by any dream. This thought is frightening and shows the soul almost as if it were extinguished.

I also ask, if it is shown that the soul has a body, whether it lacks any of the senses. Certainly, if it has no need of smelling, as I think, it can be inferred that it has none of tasting or touching, and I doubt whether it retains any need of seeing and hearing. Why are the demons said to hear, not through the men whom they torment, but even when they appear in their own bodies? In regard to sight, if they have a

body, how do they pass from place to place without the guidance of the sense of sight? Do you think human souls are not like that when they go out of the body, that they have some kind of body but do not lack any of the senses? How does it happen that many persons, awake and walking about, have seen the dead entering their homes either by day or by night, as they had been accustomed to do? I have heard of this more than once, and it is also frequently related that at a certain period of the night, in places where bodies have been buried, especially in churches, noises are heard and prayers? I remember having heard this from more than one, for a certain holy priest is witness that he saw a crowd of spirits going out of a baptistery in luminous bodies, and afterward he heard prayers in the middle of the church. All these instances either support my inquiry, or, if they are idle tales, it is strange—and I should like to know something about it—that they come and appear and are seen outside of dreams.

There is another question on these matters. I am not dealing with the sort of fancy which the undisciplined heart fashions for itself; I am speaking of real apparitions. The way in which the angel appeared to Joseph in sleep,¹⁴ the way in which many persons have had apparitions, in the same way our dear ones who have gone before us sometimes come, appear in sleep, and speak. I recall that I saw Profuturus¹⁵ as well as Privatus and Servilius, whom I remember as holy men of our monastery, who have gone before us, and what they said to me came to pass as they said. But, if it is some higher spirit who takes their form and becomes visible to the mind, He to whom all things are naked¹⁶ from the top of the

¹⁴ Matt. 1.20.

¹⁵ Bishop of Cirta; cf. Letters 38, 71.

¹⁶ Rom. 4.13.

head will see to it. Therefore, if the Lord will deign to enlighten the reason of your Holiness regarding any of all these matters, I ask you to be so kind as to share this knowledge with me. I do not want to pass this over; perhaps it has some bearing on my inquiry.

The young man in question had a vision at the time when he was dying, and, in a sense, he followed it out. It seemed that in his sleep a fellow student and fellow reader, with whom he used to take notes for me, who had departed from the body eight months before, came to him. When he was asked by the young man to whom he appeared why he had come, he said: 'I have come to take my friend away from here.' And so it happened. For in that same house an old man who was half-awake caught sight of a man carrying in his hand a laurel branch and a writing. After this vision, it is added that the father of the boy, a priest, began to stay at the monastery with the old man, Theasius,¹⁷ for consolation, but the third day after the boy's death the same boy was seen entering the monastery and was asked by a certain man in a dream whether he knew that he was dead; he said that he knew it and, asked whether he had been received by God, he admitted it with great thankfulness. When he was asked the reason why he had come, he then said: 'I have been sent to summon my father.' The one to whom these revelations were made awoke and told of it. This came to the ears of Bishop Theasius. He was troubled and rebuked the speaker lest it come too easily to the hearing of the priest, who might be alarmed at such a message. Why prolong the story? Four days after the apparition, while he was speaking—he had felt a mild fever, but there was no danger; the doctor was not there and

¹⁷ Legate from the Council of Carthage (401) to Emperor Honorius; cf. Letter 80.

he would have testified that there was absolutely no cause for anxiety—this same priest lay down on his bed and died. I do not pass over the fact that, on the very day on which the boy died, he asked his father for the kiss of peace, and he asked it on the third day, and at each kiss he said to his father: 'Let us together give thanks to God,' and he forced his father to say it with him, as if urging him to depart from this life as his companion. Thus, there was an interval of seven days between the two deaths. What are we to make of such happenings? Who will be a trustworthy master to teach such hidden causes? The emotion of my heart flows out to you in time of distress. There is a manifest providence in the deaths of the boy and his father, because two sparrows shall not fall to earth without the Father's will.¹⁸

That happening, I think, shows that the soul cannot entirely lack a body, because God is the only Being who is always completely without a body. The release from such a corporeal mass shows, I think, how much more alert the soul will be after its passing, for then, lightened of such a fetter, it appears, I think, much superior in action and thought, and all that spiritual tranquility shows that it is free from all troubles and errors; it is released from that sticky, slothful, and sluggish state. Now it is satisfied to enjoy that liberty which it has attained after it loses the world and its body, for you have wisely said¹⁹ that it feeds upon understanding and applies its spiritual mouth to the fountain of life where it is happy with the blessed estate of its own mind. Some time ago, in a dream, I saw brother Servilius after his death, while he was still laid out in the monastery, and he said that we struggle by means of our reason to attain knowledge, but he and those like him were established in the delight of contemplation.

¹⁸ Matt. 10.29.

¹⁹ *Confessions* 9.3.

I ask you also to tell me how many meanings can be given to wisdom, as: God is wisdom, the wise mind is wisdom; and how it is spoken of as light, as the wisdom of Beseleel who made the tabernacle and the oil of unction;²⁰ as the wisdom of Solomon or any other, and how they differ from each other; and whether that one eternal wisdom with the Father is to be understood in these gradations; and how the gifts of the Holy Spirit are said to be distributed: 'Who divideth to every one his own according as he will';²¹ or whether with the exception of that wisdom which alone is not created, these are created, and have their proper substance; or whether they are produced and take their name from the kind of effect they bring about. I want to know many things. May the Lord give you grace and wisdom to dictate and write to us quickly. I have written without skill or polish, but because you so kindly know what I ask, I beg by Christ our Lord that you correct me in this and teach me what you understand that I wish to know.

*159. Augustine and the brothers who are with me give greeting in the Lord to the blessed lord, my revered and cherished brother and fellow priest, Evodius, and the brothers who are with you
(c. 414)*

The bearer of this is a brother named Barbarus, a servant of God, who has been settled at Hippo for some time, an ardent and diligent hearer of the word of God. He asked for this letter to your Holiness in which we commend him to you in the Lord, and send you through him the greetings due to you. But, to answer the letter of your Holiness in which you

²⁰ Exod. 31.2-11.

²¹ Cf. 1 Cor. 12.11.

have worked out some weighty questions would be a laborious task even for persons of leisure and endowed with a greater gift of argument and a keener understanding than I have. There were two letters of yours in which you asked many deep questions, but one of them has gone astray somehow or other, and has not turned up though I have spent a long time looking for it. The other one,¹ which I have found, contains a very sweet eulogy of a young man, a good and chaste servant of God; it tells how he departed from this life, and how he gave proof of his meritorious state by well-attested apparitions to the brethren. Then you take advantage of this to set forth and develop a most obscure question about the soul; whether it leaves the body with some other kind of body, which enables it to go from place to place or to be confined in material places. The treatment of a matter of this kind—if, indeed, it can be analyzed and made clear by such as we are—calls for care and the closest kind of application, and that means a mind entirely free from preoccupations like mine. However, if you want to know my views in brief, I emphatically do not think that the soul leaves the body with a material body.

It is for him to try to explain how those apparitions and predictions of future events take place who knows what force produces such images in anyone's mind when he thinks. We see and clearly perceive that numberless images occur in it, or many objects seen or experienced by the other bodily senses—and it is no matter at present whether they occur in sequence or at random, but only that they do occur, which is evident—but whoever can explain how or by what force they occur, all of them being of daily and constant experience, may venture to make some conjecture and offer a formula for those much more exceptional visions. For my part, I am less inclined to venture on this, because I feel myself inad-

1 Letter 158.

equate to explain the occurrence of what we constantly experience in ourselves throughout life, awake and asleep. While I have been dictating this letter to you, I have had a mental picture of you, though you are far away and unaware of it, and, according to my interior knowledge of you, I have imagined how you would be affected by these words. I am not able to comprehend and discover how this takes place in my mind, but I am certain it is not done by material masses or material qualities, although the image is very like your body. This will do for the time being as an answer dictated by a busy man in a hurry. In Book 12 of the work I wrote on Genesis,² this question is treated exhaustively, and the argument is enriched with many examples drawn from personal experiences and from those reported on reliable evidence. When you read it you will judge what I have been able to accomplish, if the Lord deigns to grant me to publish that work, properly corrected, thus ending my discussion and meeting the expectation of many brethren.

However, I shall relate one incident briefly, to give you food for thought. Our brother, Gennadius,³ a physician known to almost everybody and very dear to us, who is at present living in Carthage, after having gained fame at Rome by the exercise of his skill, is, as you know, a man of devout mind, kind and generous heart, and untiring compassion, as shown by his care of the poor. He told us that he doubted once, while still young and zealous in those acts of kindness, whether there was any life after death. As God would not abandon a man of his disposition and works of mercy, there appeared to him in sleep a handsome youth of dignified mien, who said to him: 'Follow me.' He followed and came to a certain city, where he began to hear, on his

² The treatise *De Genesi ad litteram*, begun in 401, published about 415. Book 12 is a study of St. Paul's vision (2 Cor. 12.2-4) and of visions in general.

³ Nothing further is known of this Gennadius.

right, singing of such exquisite sweetness that it surpassed all known and ordinary sweetness. Then, as he listened, he asked what it was and his guide said it was the hymns of the blessed and the saints. I do not clearly remember what he said he saw on his left. When he awoke, the dream vanished and he thought of it only as one does of a dream.

But, on another night, behold, the same youth appeared to him again and asked whether he recognized him; he answered that he did so fully and perfectly. Then the youth asked where he had known him. He remembered what to reply to that, too, and described the whole vision and the hymns of the saints which the other had led him there to hear, recalling them with ease as a recent experience. Thereupon, the youth asked whether he had been asleep or awake when he saw what he had described. He answered: 'It was in a dream.' The other said: 'You remember well, it is true, that you saw all that in a dream, but you must know that even now you see, although you are asleep.' When he heard that, he believed it was so and expressed it by his answer. Then the one who was teaching him continued and said: 'Where is your body now?' He answered: 'In my bedroom.' 'And do you know,' said the other, 'that in that same helpless body, your eyes are fast shut and useless, and that you see nothing with those eyes?' Genadius answered: 'I know it.' His guide went on: 'Then, with what kind of eyes do you see me?' He fell silent at this, finding no reply, and, as he remained in doubt, the youth made known what he was trying to teach by these questions. He went on: 'As those eyes of flesh are now inactive and perform no function while your body lies asleep in bed, yet you have eyes with which you behold me and a sight of which you make use, so, when you die and the eyes of your flesh see nothing, there will be in you another life by which you will live and sense by which you will perceive. See to it that henceforth you do not doubt of the life which remains after death.' Thus this

faithful man says that his doubt on this matter was removed, and what was his teacher but the providence and mercy of God?

Someone may say that we have not solved, but increased, the difficulty by relating this incident. Well, each one is free to believe these words or not to believe them, and each one has himself as a very intricate problem to occupy him. Every day man wakes and sleeps and thinks. Let him say whence come those thoughts resembling the shapes, the qualities and the motions of bodies yet not composed of corporeal matter. Let him say it, if he can, but, if he cannot, why does he rashly try to form some kind of definitive opinion about these very rare and unusual experiences when he cannot explain the constant and daily ones? As for me, words fail me to explain how those seemingly material bodies, without a real body, are produced; yet, as I know that they are not produced by the body, so I wish I could know how we perceive those things which are seen sometimes by the spirit and are thought to be seen by the body, or how we are to distinguish the visions of those who are deluded by error or impiety, when they are generally described in the same terms as the visions of the good and holy. Time would fail me rather than material, if I were to list further examples. Remember me, most blessed lord, revered and cherished brother, and may you be strong in the mercy of the Lord.

160. Evodius gives greeting to Bishop Augustine¹ (c. 414)

Perfect reason is that which exhibits the knowledge of all things and especially of the things of eternity, which are comprehended by the intellect. This reason is eternal, it must

¹ The salutation is not found in the Mss. which give as title: 'Letter of Evodius to blessed Augustine concerning reason and God.'

be eternal, and reason itself teaches that the eternal is that which has neither beginning nor end nor change nor variation. Reason must be eternal, then, not only because it teaches and demonstrates what is eternal, but much more because eternity itself could not exist without reason; it would not be eternity, I think, if reason itself were not eternal. Secondly, reason itself demonstrates that God exists, or must necessarily exist, and that it must be that He cannot be other than God. Evidently, then, whether there are persons who know this or not, since God is eternal, it cannot be doubted that reason is eternal, since it observes that God must necessarily exist, and thus it proves that it is co-eternal with Him.

There are, however, some truths which reason must take for granted, so that reason precedes and the effect follows of a happening which reason shows in the future, as for example, when the world was made, reason held that there might be a world. Therefore, reason existed before the world. Therefore, too, the things which reason knew were to happen were subsequent to reason, so that reason was first, and afterward came the making of the world. Now, then, since reason shows that God exists or must necessarily exist, what are we to suppose before Him so that God could exist? Do we suppose reason before God as reason before the world, or God before reason, since it is absolutely improbable that God should exist without reason? For, if God is eternal, it is through reason that He is and is eternal, and reason is, then, God or of God, as reason itself teaches. But, if reason is God, it demonstrates that God is reason, and these can be coeval and co-eternal. Reason itself shows that for God to be such is not possible if He is not God. But, if reason is removed—a forbidden thing to say—there will be no God if there is no reason to prove that God must necessarily exist. God therefore is, since the reason of Him is that He should be. Since there is a God, without doubt there is reason which teaches that He is.

What, then, if it can be said, is first in God: reason or God? But, God will not exist unless reason exists to teach that God must necessarily exist; there will be no reason if there is no God. Therefore, there is neither first nor last. This divine nature possesses somehow and at the same time both reason and God. One begets one: either reason begets God or God begets reason. But, perhaps reason and God might be said to be subordinate or in a subordinate state? God and reason are one in one. It is well said that God begets reason because reason shows that God exists. God is known by reason as the Son by the Father, and reason is known by God as the Father by the Son. For reason itself with God is God. God was never at any time without reason, or reason without God. God exists, then, if reason exists, and the Son exists if the Father exists. Consequently, if reason is removed—to say what it is forbidden to say—then not even God exists, for through reason His act and operation by which He is God also exist. Let us repeat the same arguments. If there was no reason, there was no God; if there is no God, there was no reason. Reason, then, and God are an eternal fact; God and reason are likewise an everlasting fact. But the joining and uniting of reason to God and of God to reason, of the Father to the Son and of the Son to the Father, show forth their beginnings, so to speak, and the causes of their existence, because one cannot exist without the other. Words fail, and what is said is only said to ward off silence. But are we to say that God is the source of reason or reason the source of God, since there can be no fruit without root, nor is the root anything without fruit? Let us draw a comparison, so as to form some idea of God: in the grain of wheat there exists a principle of fertility which keeps it from being unproductive; but, if there were no grain of wheat, the principle would have nothing from which to produce its effect.

Therefore, since reason which is God either manifests that

God is reason or reason is God, the one, so to speak, manifesting the other; and the Father is not manifested except by the Son, and the Son is not manifested except by the Father, so that the Father is seemingly in silence when we come to the Father by the Son, and the Son is seemingly in silence when we come to the Son by the Father; and if one is in some way hidden, the other is manifest in such wise that the one manifesting Himself manifests the other, also, and that one cannot be known while the other remains unknown, because 'He that seeth me,' He says, 'seeth the Father also,'² and 'No man cometh to the Father but by me,'³ and 'No man cometh to me except the Father draw him,'⁴ we have undertaken an exceedingly toilsome and difficult task in trying to comprehend something about God in spite of our lack of comprehension. Nevertheless, as none of the things which exist are intelligible or knowable without some external appearance, so it is much more true that nothing is known without the Son, that is, without reason. What more? Was the Father irrational at any time, being bereft of reason? Who would dare say it? Therefore, it must be known by reason that God is One of one, or One in one and at the same time One, because God is One and love must necessarily reside in Him, because reason itself teaches that it must always possess love, or God commands that love is always to be made manifest.

² John 14.9.

³ John 14.6.

⁴ John 6.44.

161. Evodius and the brothers who are with me give greeting in the Lord to the holy lord, his revered and cherished brother and fellow priest, Augustine, and the brothers who are with you (c. 414)

Some time ago I asked you a question about reason and God, and I sent it in a letter by Jobinus who was on an errand to the Marcian estate, but I have not yet deserved a reply. However, I have had in my possession two letters of your Holiness, one addressed to the noble Volusian,¹ the other to Italica,² a noble lady in Christ, and on reading them I happened on what you wrote in the letter about the virginal conception of our Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh, and of His birth: 'If a reason for this is sought, it will not be a miracle; if an example is required, it will not be unique.'³ It seemed to me that it was possible to say something similar about the birth of every man or of every living creature or seed. If a reason is sought for this, it will not be found by investigation, and it will be unique, if an example is required, because no such example is found. For, what mating of man and woman or what secret result of any conception at any time can be explained by reason, or what explanation can be found of seeds springing from the earth and first rotting away and then bearing fruit? It is no less wonderful—if an example of the exceptional is sought—that a single worm should be found perfectly formed by parthenogenesis, without parentage,⁴ inside an apple, and that is why I think it is used as an example in: 'I am a worm and no man.'⁵ Therefore, I do not

1 Letter 137.

2 Letter 92.

3 Letter 137.

4 Spontaneous generation is a discredited theory today. For the worm to be in the apple it is necessary that a female in the moth stage lay an egg in the blossom. When the blossom turns to fruit, the egg becomes a worm without need of the male principle.

5 Ps. 21.7.

know how any explanation can be given of conceptions joint or single, and I think the Virgin's conception is not the only one of which no explanation can be given, since there is none to be offered of any conception.

But, 'an example is required.' Here are some: mares are said to conceive of the wind, hens of dust, ducks of water, and several other animals produce offspring without male seed. Certainly, if they do not produce offspring as virgins, at least it is possible for them to conceive without being violated. Why, then, say: 'If an example is demanded, it will not be remarkable,' when so many examples are forthcoming? Everyone knows that some living creatures are produced not only in the bodies of women but even in those of men. Was there any seed there to bring about conception? These are examples, these are wonders for which no reason can be given, or, if it comes to this, that no such thing has ever occurred in a virginal man, there are examples in creatures of other natures, which are conceived and born without seed, for which no really adequate explanation can be given. Moreover, it is possible to find some such instance of generation in which the birth takes place without violation of natural integrity. I hear frequently that the spider produces all those threads of which it spins its web without any male conception or any demeaning birth pangs, and it brings them forth marvelously according to the manner of its own nature, showing that this exception is granted to itself only. But, if it is inquired into, is this the only wonder, and is it entirely impossible to find other such examples? I fear that these instances may become so important that those who did not believe that a virgin could conceive may be convinced by them that it is indeed wonderful but will not be unique, for all the works of God are wonderful because they are performed in wisdom. If this objection should be made to us, what are we to answer?

Here, again, is a point that troubles me exceedingly: that

someone could say of the substance of the glorified body of the Lord that it will be able to see the substance of God—you said in your letter to Italica⁶ that it could not and that is certain—so, when we begin to reason that it cannot, this objection may be made to us, that in His conception and nativity what happened was miraculous and unique, and they will not ask an explanation and example because this was granted to Him alone, and, as no explanation is given of His conception and birth, but this unique privilege is found in Him alone, so, no explanation is given nor any example required of His seeing God, because to Him alone is it uniquely granted to see with bodily eyes the substance of the divinity. But it will be answered that an explanation can be given and that it is not granted to any corporeal substance to behold incorporeal substance, and I fear they will answer that then His conception can be explained by reason and can be supported by examples. For, either reason will fail among men, and they will give up examples and will assert that the only-begotten Son can see God with bodily eyes, or, if an explanation is drawn from this, it will follow that an explanation can be given by certain too wise men of His conception and subsequent birth. I ask what answer can be made to such men. I am not sowing seeds of strife but I am asking how to answer their artful questions. For myself, I believe that the Virgin's conception and her giving birth to her Child were such as I have always believed them, and I have concluded from reason that God cannot be seen by any body however glorified. However, I think that one should go out to meet men who either try to stir up trouble by their questions, or who are aroused by a fervent zeal for learning. Pray for us. May the peace and charity of Christ make your Holiness mindful of us, holy and revered lord, most blessed brother.

6 Letter 92.

162. *Augustine and the brothers who are with me give greeting in the Lord to the blessed lord, his revered brother and holy fellow bishop, Evodius, and the brothers who are with you (c. 414)*

You ask many questions of a very busy man, and what is worse, you think I ought to rush right into dictation of matters so difficult that only with the greatest care in dictating or writing could they be treated so as to adapt them to such an intellect as yours. Besides, what we write is not going to be read by you only and by those who might be considered your equals, but also by others, endowed with less keen and less trained minds, whose great eagerness, whether friendly or hostile, leads them to study my writings, and then it is impossible for me to get them back. In view of that, you see what care is needed in writing, especially on subjects so important that great scholars toil over them. If whenever I have something in hand it has to be laid aside and put off, so that some other question which comes up may have a prior answer, what will happen if something comes up while I am answering your questions? Would you like it if I laid aside yours and took up others, and if those that come last should always be dealt with first, and only those would have the good fortune to be completed which would not be interrupted by other questions arising while the former are being written? That would be a very difficult position for me and I do not think it would please you. Therefore, as I ought not to break off other work when your questions interrupt, so I ought not to leave off yours if others again break in on me. Yet I am not suffered to preserve this fairness, for look now, in order to answer your letter and warn you of this, I have interrupted what I was doing, and I have wrenched my mind from another important task to your letter.

It is easy for me to send you this letter of excuse—not an

ungracious one, I think—but it is not so easy to answer your queries, and I imagine that in the works which now keep me closely occupied there will be passages in which I shall explain what you ask, if the Lord is favorable to me. As a matter of fact, many of those difficulties which you have just sent have been solved in the books which I have not yet published on the Trinity and on Genesis.¹ If you will recall points which you know well, or, if I mistake not, you once did know well, although you may have forgotten them, which I wrote after conferring and discussing with you in my treatises either on the greatness of the soul or on free will,² you will find therein the answers to your problems, without help from me; that is, of course, if you apply the labor of your mind to draw the conclusions from the points which are there made clear and definite. You also have some help in the book on religion;³ if you would review it and look into it, you would never think that reason can prove the necessity of God's existence, or that by reasoning it can ever be established that God must necessarily exist. In the science of numbers, which we certainly make use of in everyday life, if we say seven plus three ought to be ten, we do not speak exactly. It is not: they ought to be ten—they are ten. In the books which I have mentioned I have proved adequately, according to my way of thinking, the cases in which we may properly say that things ought to be, whether they now are, or that they may be so. A man ought to be wise; if he is wise that he may remain so, if he is not yet wise that he may become so. But God ought not to be wise, He is wise.

Reflect also and think deeply and at length over those questions about apparitions on which I wrote to you lately,⁴

1 *De Trinitate* (416); *De Genesi ad litteram* (415).

2 *De quantitate animae* is in dialogue form with Evodius as one of the speakers (c. 388); *De libero arbitrio* (c. 396).

3 *De vera religione* (c. 396).

4 Letter 159.

and those subtle points which you raised but which only involved you in greater difficulties. Do not skim over them, but let your thought dwell upon them, and then perhaps you will surmise how the soul is present or absent. Doubtless, in those apparitions it lingers in sleep, while it is absent from the sense faculties and from that consciousness of perception which it lends to the eyes when awake. When this absence of the soul from the eyes, that is, in a manner of speaking, from the windows of the body, which occurs when we sleep, is increased so as to cause a total withdrawal, we have death. Therefore, as the soul withdraws from the faculty of sight to the visions seen in dreams, but does not retain anything of the body, unless, perhaps, the objects seen in dreams are corporeal and we imagine ourselves in the body tossed back and forth somehow among them—which I think is not your kind of vision—so, if the soul is completely withdrawn and departs, as happens in death, we are not to think that it has taken any kind of body with it out of the body. For, if it did take anything with it, then, obviously, when we sleep and it withdraws from the eyes, it would take with it as it leaves them other eyes, corporeal but more penetrating, which it does not do. However, it does take with it some kind of sight, very like the other but not corporeal, and with it sees similar images in sleep, but not corporeal ones.

Moreover, if anyone should grant that even the visions of dreams, which look like bodies, are nothing if not corporeal, he would imagine that he was making a considerable statement. That slowness of understanding is hard to win over; it is found in many minds, even those of more than average keenness, and it occurs because they fail to notice how much reality there is in images of bodies which are produced in the spiritual part of us, but are definitely not corporeal. However, when they are forced to examine these images, if they have observed correctly and have discovered that they are not

corporeal but are resemblances of bodies, they are still not able to give an immediate explanation of why and how they are formed; whether they have an existence of their own or exist only in their subject; whether they are formed in the mind as letters with ink on parchment, where the ink and the parchment are separate substances; or whether they are formed like a seal or some other figure on wax, where the wax is the subject and the impression is in the subject; or whether these images are formed in our mind in both ways, sometimes one and sometimes another.

But the objects which are remote from our bodily senses and are found in our memory, or which we ourselves, in thought and according to our pleasure, create, arrange, increase, diminish, change in location, appearance, movement and innumerable other circumstances are not the only ones which affect us. Perhaps in the same class, also, are those with which we are bewildered in sleep, when we are not receiving a heavenly message, except that the latter we act on willingly, the former we endure against our will. And these images are not the only ones that affect us, which, as one may reasonably infer, are made up by the mind from the mind, although this is brought about by more hidden causes which make one thing rather than another appear in consciousness; but there is also that kind spoken of by the Prophet: 'And the angel that spoke in me said to me,'⁵—for we are not to believe that words from outside came to the corporeal ears of the Prophet when he said 'that spoke in me,' not to me. Were those words formed by the mind like spoken words such as we use when we run over or even sing something silently in memory, but were they still uttered by the angel, and did the Prophet in a miraculous way perceive that they were suggested to him by another than himself? And in this other passage of the Gospel: 'Behold the angel of the Lord appeared to him in sleep,

5 Zach. 1.9.

saying . . .⁶: how did even an angelic form appear to closed eyes, since, when angels appeared to Abraham, he was awake and felt them when he washed their feet?⁷ Even a spirit appearing to the spirit of one sleeping has some kind of corporeal aspect, as we also seem to ourselves in dreams to move along under a certain form, but very different from the movement of limbs prone in slumber.

These matters impress us and they are out of the ordinary because they have a cause too hidden for one man to be able to see or explain to another. When the reason of a thing is hidden or it is a thing of unusual occurrence because it is either unique or rare, it is a cause of wonder to us. It was because of that hidden reason that I said in my letter what you recalled having read, when I was answering those who refuse to believe that a virgin brought forth Christ while remaining a virgin: 'If a reason is sought, it will not be a miracle.'⁸ And I said that, not because it was something without a reason, but because it was hidden from those for whom God willed it to be miraculous. Regarding that other source of wonder which comes from some unusual occurrence, it is written of the Lord that He marveled at the faith of the centurion; He could not be ignorant of the cause of anything, but here wonder is used as a term of praise for one whose like had not appeared among the Hebrew people. And that wonder is adequately expressed when the Lord said: 'Amen I say to you I have not found so great faith in Israel.'⁹

As to my adding in that same letter: 'If an example is required, it will not be unique,'¹⁰ you are wrong in thinking you have found an example in the worm which is born in the apple and the spider which draws the thread of its web from

6 Matt. 1.20.

7 Gen. 18.4.

8 Letter 137.

9 Matt. 8.10; Luke 7.9.

10 Letter 137.

an inviolate body. Such clever remarks are made for the sake of a seeming resemblance, sometimes far-fetched, sometimes apt, but Christ was the only man born of a virgin; hence you now understand, I think, why I said it was unique. All the things which God does, whether ordinary or extraordinary, have their own causes and their right and unimpeachable reasons. But when these causes and reasons are hidden, we wonder at what is done; when they are evident, we say that they are done logically or appropriately, and it is nothing to wonder at that they are done as reason requires them to be done; or, if we do wonder, it is not the wonder of stupefaction at something unheard of, but of praise for excellence, the kind of wonder by which the centurion was praised. Therefore, that statement of mine is not blameworthy when I said: 'If a reason is sought, it will not be a miracle,' since it is another kind of wonder when the reason is apparent to the one who wonders. In the same way, that statement is not blameworthy which says: 'God tempteth no man,'¹¹ since there is another kind of temptation in accord with which it is rightly said elsewhere: 'The Lord your God tryeth you.'¹²

Let no one think that it can properly be said that the Father can be seen by the Son with bodily eyes and not rather as the Son is seen by the Father, because those who think this but are unable to give a reason for it can also say in their turn: 'If a reason is sought, it will not be a miracle,' for this was said, not because there is no reason, but because it is a hidden one. Whoever essays to refute this opinion ought to prove that there is no reason for this error, wrongly called a miracle. For, as there is no reason why the nature of God should die or disintegrate or sin—and when we say that God cannot do that we do not detract from His power but praise His eternity and truth—so, when we say that He cannot be

¹¹ James 1.13.

¹² Deut. 13.3.

seen by bodily eyes, the reason is not an apparent one. However, the reason is clear to those who understand rightly; thereby it is obvious that God cannot be a body; that nothing can be seen by bodily eyes except an object which is perceived in some spatial relationship; that this can only be a body and a substance which is less in its parts than in the whole; and even those who cannot yet grasp this ought to believe that it is monstrous to believe it of God.

The reason for different degrees of speed and slowness in the movements of bodies, and for other bodily qualities, is not known, and this gives us a whole forest of visible wonders. But does that prevent us from knowing that there are bodies, that we have a body, and that there is no corporeal object, however small, which does not occupy its portion of space according to its kind and that it is not everywhere wholly present in that space, but is less in a part than in the whole? Since there are evident facts, there are conclusions to be drawn from them—but it would take too long to do this now—by which it can be proved, not that the reason is unknown, but that there is no reason at all which obliges us to believe or makes it possible to understand that God can be seen by bodily eyes, since He is everywhere wholly present, and is not distributed through space in a corporeal mass, which must of necessity consist of larger and smaller parts. I could say a good deal more on this subject, if I had undertaken to expound it in this letter, but I have already unconsciously written at length, almost forgetting my duties. Perhaps this will satisfy your zeal—though I doubt it—for with a few hints you can draw further suitable conclusions, but it would not be so for those into whose hands it could more profitably fall if the questions were more carefully and more fully discussed. Men toil at learning, but they are at the same time not clever enough to understand short explanations and disinclined to read long ones. Likewise, men toil at teaching, vainly devising short lessons for the lazy and

long ones for the dull. Send me a copy of that letter of yours which has gone astray at this end and cannot be found. May you enjoy good health and vigor in the Lord, and do not forget us.

163. Evodius, Bishop, to Augustine, Bishop (c. 414)

I sent to your Holiness: first, a question about reason and God—I think it went by Jobinus who serves the handmaids of God;¹ second, a question about the Saviour's body, with an opinion that it sees the substance of God. I now add a third: whether the rational soul which the Saviour took with His body was the only one of its kind, according to the opinions which are set forth when the origin of the soul is in question—if there is any support of truth for them—or whether, although it is a rational soul, it will not be of the same species as the human soul is said to be? I now ask a fourth question: Who are those spirits to whom Peter refers when speaking of the Lord in his Epistle: 'Being put to death indeed in the flesh, but enlivened in the spirit. In which also coming he preached to those spirits,'² and the rest, adding that they were in hell³ and that Christ, descending, preached to them all and set them all free by His grace from darkness and suffering, that from the time of the Lord's resurrection judgment might be awaited by an empty hell? I am anxious to know what your Holiness thinks of this.

¹ I.e., a community of nuns. Whether Jobinus was a chaplain or a convent courier is not clear.

² 1 Peter 3.18,19.

³ Not the hell of the damned, but the limbo of the blessed where the souls of the saved were detained until the opening of heaven by Christ.

164. *Augustine gives greeting in the Lord to the blessed lord, his brother and fellow bishop, Evodius (c. 414)*

The question on the Epistle of the Apostle Peter which you propounded to me is one, as I think you know, which disturbs me profoundly. Therefore, I turn this same question back to you in the hope that you yourself or anyone else you might find who can do it may remove and put an end to my doubt. If I am able to solve it first, when the Lord grants me to do it, and I am able to impart it to you, I will not cheat your Charity of it, but for the present I will confide my distress to you, so that you may either think it out yourself in accord with the Apostle's words, or may consult about it if you find someone who is able to help you.

When he said that Christ had been put to death in the flesh but enlivened in the spirit, he added immediately that He had come to preach to 'those spirits that were in prison, which had been sometime incredulous when they waited for the patience of God in the days of Noe, when the ark was a-building; wherein a few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water.' Then he went on and said: 'Whereunto baptism, being of the like form, now saveth you also.'¹ If the Lord, after His death, preached in hell to the spirits shut up in prison, what troubles me is why those alone who had been incredulous when the ark was building deserved this benefit. For, certainly, from the days of Noe to the Passion of Christ how many thousands of people died whom He could have found in hell! I do not mean those who believed in God, as the prophets and the patriarchs of the stock of Abraham, as Noe himself before that time, and his whole household which was saved by water, except perhaps one son who was afterward repudiated;² as there were also, in addition to the descendants of Jacob,

¹ 1 Peter 3.81-21.

² Cham was cursed by Noe (Gen. 9.25).

others who believed in God, like Job, or the inhabitants of Ninive, or others again who either appear in Scripture or are lost in human history—but I am speaking of all those many thousands of men who did not know God, and were given up to the worship of demons and idols from the days of Noe to the Passion of Christ, who departed from this life and whom Christ found in hell. Why did He not preach to them, but to those only who had been incredulous in the days of Noe when the ark was building? Or, if He did preach to all of them, why did Peter pass over the uncounted multitude of others and mention only those?

It is clearly shown that the Lord died in the flesh and descended into hell, for it is not possible to controvert the prophecy which says: 'Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell,'³ and which Peter quotes in the Acts of the Apostles, so that no one may dare to give it another meaning; or those words of the same Peter in which he asserts that God had loosed the sorrows of hell, 'as it was impossible that he should be holden by it.'⁴ Who, then, but an unbeliever will deny that Christ was in hell? And if one is hard put to explain how the sorrows of hell were loosed by Him—for He did not stay in them as in bondage, and hence did not loose them as if they were chains which bound Him—it is easy to understand that they might have been loosed like the snares of hunters, not because they held Him, but so that they might not hold Him. That is how we can believe that He loosed the sorrows which did not bind Him, but did bind others whom He knew He was to set free.

But it would be rash to say exactly who they are. For, if we say that all of those who were found there were set free without exception, it would be a cause of gratification—if we could prove it—especially in the case of some whom we

³ Ps. 15.10; Acts 2.29.

⁴ Acts 2.24.

have known intimately through their written works, whose eloquence and genius we admire, not only the poets and orators who have shown in many passages of their works that those same false gods of the Gentiles were worthy of scorn and ridicule, and have even at times confessed the one true God, although they shared the ancient superstitions with their contemporaries; but also those who have made the same profession, not in verse or in oratory, but in philosophy; many, even, whose works we do not possess, but of whom we learn in others' works, that they led praiseworthy lives, according to their light, and, although they did not worship God, but erred in following a vain worship, which was the public cult of their time, serving the creature rather than the Creator, in their moral practice of frugality, continency, chastity, scorn of death for the welfare of their country, and fidelity to trust, they might well be offered as models to be imitated by citizens and foes alike. Yet, when all these good acts are not directed to the end of an upright and true devotion to God, but to the empty pride of human praise and glory, they fade away and are, so to speak, devoid of fruit. Even so, some of these authors rouse such an attraction in us that we could wish to have them freed from the sufferings of hell—whether we are singular in that or like others—but human feeling is not the same as the justice of the Creator.

This being granted, if the Saviour released all the prisoners, and, as you wrote inquiringly, emptied hell so that the Last Judgment could thereafter be expected, there are some objections such as can reasonably be made, which come to my mind whenever I think over this matter. First, what is the authority for that opinion? What is written as having happened at the death of Christ, that the sorrows of hell were loosed, can be understood to apply to Himself: that He loosed them, that is, rendered them ineffective, only so far as to prevent Himself from being held by them, and this is especially

indicated by what follows: 'As it was impossible that he should be holden by it.' On the other hand, if we ask why He wished to descend into hell, where those sorrows were by which He could not be held, since, as it is written, He was 'free among the dead,'⁵ One in whom the prince and governor of death found nothing deserving of punishment, doubtless the words 'having loosed the sorrows of hell' can be applied, if not to all, at least to some whom He judged worthy of that liberation. Thus, His descent into hell would not be thought fruitless, because it would have brought no benefit to any of those there imprisoned, nor should it be concluded that what the divine mercy and justice granted to some had been granted to all.

Almost the whole Church agrees that in the case of the first man, the father of the human race, the Lord did free him from there, and, wherever this tradition came from, we have to believe that the Church has grounds for accepting it, even though no express authority of the canonical Scriptures is quoted for it. However, that passage in the Book of Wisdom: 'She preserved him that was first formed by God, the father of the world, when he was created alone. And she brought him out of his sin and gave him power to govern all things,'⁶ seems to lend itself more to this opinion than it does to any other interpretation. Some authorities add that this boon was granted to the saints of old: Abel, Seth, Noe and his household, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and other patriarchs and prophets, namely, that when the Lord descended into hell they were freed from those sorrows.

I do not see any way of explaining how Abraham, into whose bosom the poor and godly Lazarus was carried, was in those sorrows. Those who are able may explain it. I do not know of anyone who would not find it unthinkable that only

⁵ Ps. 87.6.

⁶ Wisd. 10.1.2.

those two, that is, Abraham and Lazarus, were in the bosom of that noteworthy peace before the Lord descended into hell, and that those two alone were meant when these words were addressed to the rich man: 'Between us and you there is fixed a great chaos, so that they who would pass from hence to you cannot, nor from thence come hither.'⁷ Moreover, if there were no more than two there, who would venture to say that the patriarchs and prophets were not there, men to whose goodness and devotion the Scripture of God bears such resounding witness? I do not see what the Lord did for these when He loosed the sorrows of hell which were not for them, especially as I can find no passage in Scripture in which hell itself is spoken of as good. But, if this is found nowhere on divine authority, then that bosom of Abraham, that is, an abode of peace and quiet, assuredly cannot be taken as part of hell. Moreover, in those words of our great Master where He makes Abraham say: 'Between us and you there is fixed a great chaos,' I think it is quite clear that the bosom of that perfect happiness is not a part or a section of hell. And what is that great chaos but a great gap separating those two states between which it not only exists, but is fixed? Consequently, if the holy Scripture had said that Christ after death came into that bosom of Abraham, without naming hell and its sorrows, I wonder if anyone would dare to affirm that He descended into hell.

But, because this clear testimony mentions both hell and its sorrows, I can think of no reason for believing that the Saviour went there except to save souls from its sorrows; I am still uncertain whether He saved all those whom He found there or certain ones whom He deemed worthy of that boon. I do not doubt, however, that He was in hell, and that He granted this favor to those entangled in its sorrows. I have not yet discovered what He brought to the just who were in

⁷ Luke 16.26.

the bosom of Abraham, but I see that He had never withdrawn from them the blissful presence of His divinity, as He promised the thief, on the very day of His death, that he would be with Him in Paradise,⁸ since He was about to descend in order to loose the sorrows of hell. Assuredly, therefore, He was already present in Paradise and in the bosom of Abraham by His beatifying wisdom, and in hell by His judgment and power, for the divinity which is confined to no place is everywhere present. But in His created nature, which He took at a definite time, becoming man without ceasing to be God, that is, in His soul, He was in hell, as the Scripture clearly declares, both by the predictions of prophecy and by the apostolic meaning plainly attached to the prophecy in the words: 'Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell.'⁹

I know it seems to some that the death of the Lord brought to certain just souls the same resurrection which is promised to us at the end of time, since it is written that by the earthquake which occurred at His Passion the rocks were rent and the graves opened and many bodies of the saints arose and were seen with Him in the holy city after His Resurrection.¹⁰ But, if these did not resume their sleep by the reburial of their bodies, and if so many preceded Him in that resurrection, we must certainly examine and find out how Christ is the 'first-born from the dead.'¹¹ The answer to this might be that it was said by anticipation, but it meant that the tombs were opened by the earthquake, while Christ hung on the cross, while the bodies of the just did not rise then, but later, after He had first risen, although it was added to that sentence by anticipation, as I said, so that we should unhesitatingly believe that Christ was the first-born from the dead, and that it was then granted to the just to rise to eternal

⁸ Luke 23.43.

⁹ Ps. 15.10.

¹⁰ Matt. 27.51-53.

¹¹ Col. 1.18; Apoc. 1.5.

incorruption and immortality following His leadership. In that case, there still remains this difficulty, how Peter could say—and he said it with absolute truth, since he asserted that Christ, not David, was foretold by that prophecy—that His flesh did not see corruption, but he added that the tomb of David was still with them.¹² And this would certainly not be a convincing argument, if David's body were no longer there, because, if he had risen at the time of Christ's death, his flesh would not have seen corruption, but his tomb would still be there. It seems hard that David should not have been in that resurrection of the just, when Christ was of his seed, as is so often, so distinctly, and so honorably repeated to his praise. Those words also would be made ineffective which were said to the Hebrews concerning the just men of old: that they provided better things for us 'that they should not be perfected without us,'¹³ which would happen if they were established in that incorrupt resurrection which is promised for our perfection at the end of the world.

Therefore, regarding Peter's reasons for mentioning only those who had been incredulous in the days of Noe when the ark was building, as the spirits in prison to whom the Gospel was preached, you see how obscure a matter it is, and what keeps me from venturing to make a pronouncement on it. Another reason is that when the Apostle had said: 'Whereunto baptism, being of the like form, now saveth you also, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh but the examination of a good conscience towards God by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is on the right hand of God, swallowing down death that we might be made heirs of life everlasting, being gone into heaven, the angels and powers and virtues being made subject to him;' he went on and added: 'Christ, therefore, having suffered in the flesh, be you also armed with the

¹² Acts 2.27,29; 13.35.

¹³ Hab. 11.40.

same knowledge, for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sins that he may live the rest of his time in the flesh, not after the desires of men, but according to the will of God.' Then he added: 'For the time past is sufficient to have fulfilled the will of the gentiles, for them who have walked in riotousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and unlawful worshipping of idols. Wherein they think it strange that you run not into the same confusion of riotousness, speaking evil of you. Who shall render account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead'; and to these words he adds: 'For this cause was the Gospel preached also to the dead that they might be judged indeed according to men in the flesh, but may live according to God in the spirit.'¹⁴

Who would not be moved by the depth of that thought? He says the Gospel was preached to the dead. If by these we rightly understand those who have gone out of the body, I think they will be those of whom he said above that they were incredulous in the days of Noe, or, certainly, all whom Christ found in hell. What, then, does he mean by saying: 'That they might be judged indeed according to men in the flesh, but may live according to God in the spirit?' How are they judged in the flesh which they no longer have, if they are in hell, or which they have not yet received back, even if they are loosed from the sorrows of hell? If, as you suggest by your question, hell was emptied, not all of those who were there can be believed to have risen in the flesh, nor did those who rose again and appeared with the Lord receive their flesh in order to be judged in it according to man. And I do not see, either, how it can be applied to those who were incredulous in the days of Noe, for it is not written that they had lived in the flesh, and it is not credible that the sorrows of hell were loosed that those who were set free might receive flesh in order to discharge

¹⁴ 1 Peter 3.21,22; 4.1-6.

their penalty. What, then, is the meaning of 'that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but may live according to God in the spirit'? Was it perhaps granted to those whom Christ found in hell to be made alive in the spirit through the Gospel, although they are still subject to judgment in the flesh at the future resurrection, so as to pass to the kingdom of God through some penalty of the flesh? If that is so, why is it true only of those who were formerly unbelieving in the days of Noe, and not of the others whom the visit of Christ found there, that they lived again in the spirit through the preaching of the Gospel, though subject afterwards to judgment in the flesh by a temporary penalty? But, if we understand it of all, the question remains why Peter mentioned only those who were incredulous when the ark was building.

There is also this difficulty that those who try to give a reason for this say that, when Christ descended into hell to those who were found there, the places of punishment became like emptied prisons, because those spirits had not heard the Gospel which in their lifetime had not been preached throughout the world, and they had valid reasons for not believing what had not been announced to them, but that afterwards those who despise the preaching of the Gospel, known to and spread among all peoples, will not have that excuse; therefore, after the prison is emptied for the former there still remains a just judgment by which the obstinate and unbelieving are punished with eternal fire. Those who think this do not notice that all who depart from this life before the Gospel reaches them, even after the Resurrection of Christ, can have this excuse. For, after the Lord had returned from hell, no one was suffered to go there without hearing the Gospel, when so many were dying all over the world before this preaching reached them. All will have that excuse, which according to them was taken away from those to whom the

Lord is said to have preached when He went there, because they had not heard the Gospel before.

Perhaps someone will say that even those who died or who die after the Lord's Resurrection without having the Gospel preached to them could or can hear it there in hell, so as to believe what must be believed of the truth of Christ, and may also have the remission and salvation which those deserved to whom Christ preached there? After Christ ascended again from hell, there is no reason to believe that the report of Him died out, for He ascended from there to heaven, yet those who believe in Him will be saved by hearing of Him. Therefore, He was exalted and given a 'name which is above all names, that in his name every knee should bow,' not only 'of those that are in heaven and on earth,' but also 'under the earth.'¹⁵ But, if we agree with this opinion, which makes it possible to think that men who did not believe during their lifetime can believe in Christ in hell, who could accept conclusions which are senseless and contrary to faith? In the first place, let us not seem to grieve in vain over those who have gone out of the body without that grace, nor think that we exercise a vain care in exhorting men insistently to receive it before they die, lest they be punished by everlasting death. Again, if only those who refused to believe when the Gospel was preached to them here fail to gain benefit or profit by believing in hell, while those who did not despise the Gospel here because they never had the opportunity of hearing it can gain by believing in hell, there is an even more nonsensical conclusion—that the Gospel ought not to be preached here, since all will certainly die, and they ought to reach hell without the guilt of despising the Gospel, so that they may have the advantage of believing there—and that is a vain and impious conclusion.

¹⁵ Phil. 2.9,10.

Therefore, let us hold most firmly what faith holds, on the most solid authority, 'that Christ died according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried and that he rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures,'¹⁶ and the rest which has been written about Him with most manifest truth. Among these details is this: that He was in hell, of which He loosed the sorrows whereby it was impossible that He should be held; from these it is rightly understood that He loosed and released the souls whom He chose; that He received back the Body which He had left on the cross, and which had been laid in the tomb. Thus, in that question which you proposed on the words of the Apostle Peter, you see what puzzles me. Other points, perhaps, could prove puzzling if they were discussed more in detail, so let us examine into them by thinking over them together or by consulting someone who is qualified, if we can find any such.

However, we must take into consideration the possibility that the whole passage about the spirits shut up in prison, who had been incredulous in the days of Noe, as the Apostle Peter says, may not apply to hell at all, but to other times whose similarity he transferred to these times. Surely, that event was a likeness of the future, and by it we may understand that those who refuse now to believe in the Gospel, while the Church is being built up among all nations, are like the others who did not believe at the time when the ark was being built, and that those who have believed and have been saved by baptism are compared to the former who were thus saved by water in the same ark. That is why he said: 'Baptism, being of like form, saveth you also.' Therefore, let us adapt the rest of this passage about the incredulous to this likeness, and let us not imagine that the Gospel was preached in hell in order to win and release believers, or that it is still preached there as if the Church had been established there.

16 1 Cor. 15.3,4.

It seems to me that the reason why men are inclined to this belief, which disturbs you, and why they think that Peter meant this, is because he speaks of preaching to spirits shut up in prison, as if spirits could not be interpreted as the souls which were then shut up in the flesh and in the darkness of ignorance as in a prison, of the same kind of prison from which the Psalmist longed to be set free when he says: 'Bring my soul out of prison, that it may praise thy name.'¹⁷ Elsewhere it is called the shadow of death from which they were certainly set free, not in hell, but here, as it is written of them: 'The people that walked in darkness have seen the light.'¹⁸ But this preaching was vainly made to them in the days of Noe, because they did not believe when the patience of God waited for them, through so many years in which the same ark was built—for its building was in a sense a kind of preaching—so now, in the same way, their imitators do not believe, and are shut up in the darkness of ignorance, as in a prison, looking in vain upon the Church being built up throughout the whole world, with judgment threatening them, as then the flood in which all the incredulous perished, for so the Lord says: 'As in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until Noe entered into the ark and the flood came and destroyed them all.'¹⁹ Because this happening signified a future event, the flood also signified baptism for believers and death for unbelievers, just as there is a figure in what was said, not done, where it is written of the stone by which Christ is signified, that two effects were foretold: it is a stumbling-block for unbelievers, a building for believers.²⁰ Sometimes, however, under one figure of either

17 Ps. 141.8.

18 Isa. 9.2.

19 Matt. 24.37-39; Luke 17.26,27.

20 Ps. 117.22; Isa. 8.14; 28.16; Dan. 2.34; Matt. 21.42,44; Luke 20.17,18; Acts 4.1; Rom. 9.33.

an act or an utterance, two terms have one meaning: thus, the boards which were fitted together into the construction of the ark²¹ signify the faithful, and the eight souls who were saved in the same ark signify the same; similarly, in the Gospel, in the parable of the sheepfold, Christ Himself is both the shepherd and the door.²²

The fact that Christ had not yet come at that time should not be an obstacle to prevent us from accepting this interpretation of the Apostle Peter's words about Christ preaching to those spirits in prison who had been incredulous in the days of Noe. It was only in the flesh that He had not yet come, since 'After this he was seen upon earth and conversed with men.'²³ But, in truth, from the beginning of the human race, He came Himself, if not in the flesh, at least in the spirit, speaking in suitable manifestations to whom He willed and as He willed, either to rebuke the wicked, as He did to Cain, and before him to Adam himself and his wife, or to console the good, or to instruct both, so that some believed to their salvation, some disbelieved to their damnation. When I said 'He came in the spirit,' I meant the Son in the substance of the godhead, since He is not a body but a spirit. But what does the Son do without the Holy Spirit or without the Father, since all the operations of the Trinity are inseparable?

The very words of Scripture with which we are dealing sufficiently indicate this, I think, if they are carefully noted: 'Because Christ,' he says, 'died once for our sins, the just for the unjust, that he might offer us to God, being put to death, indeed, in the flesh but enlivened in the spirit, in which also coming he preached to those spirits that were in prison, which had been sometime incredulous in the days when the patience of God waited for them, in the days of Noe, when the ark

²¹ Exod. 26.25; 36.30; 1 Peter 3.20.

²² John 10.7; 11.

²³ Bar. 3.38.

was a-building.²⁴ And now I think the order of the words is significant: 'Christ was put to death in the flesh but enlivened in the spirit, in which spirit coming he preached to those spirits that had been sometime incredulous in the days of Noe,' since before He came in the flesh to die for us, which He did only once, He had often previously come in the spirit, appearing to whom He willed, admonishing them as He willed—of course, in the spirit—in which spirit, also, He was enlivened after He had been put to death in the flesh by His Passion. And how else was He enlivened in the spirit than by rising again through the vivifying spirit in the same flesh in which He had been put to death?

But when Jesus was put to death for us in the flesh, who would dare assert that His soul also was killed, that is, His life-giving principle as man, when there is no death for the soul except through sin, from which He was wholly exempt? If all the souls of men are derived from that one which was breathed into the first man 'by whom sin entered into the world and by sin death, and so death passed upon all men,'²⁵ either the soul of Christ was not derived from that one, since He had no sin of any kind, either original or personal, to bring the due penalty of death upon Him—a penalty which He did not owe, but which He paid for us, since the prince of this world and the lord of death found nothing in Him²⁶—and it is not unreasonable to believe that He who created a soul for the first man should create one for Himself, or, if His soul was derived from that first one, He purified it in taking it for Himself so that He might be born of the Virgin and might come to us without any trace of sin either committed or transmitted. However, if subsequent souls are not derived

²⁴ 1 Peter 3.18-20. The Vulgate has: 'When they waited for the patience of God.'

²⁵ Rom. 5.12.

²⁶ John 14.30; 12.31; Heb. 2.14.

from that one, and the flesh alone inherits original sin from Adam, then the Son of God created a soul for Himself as He creates them for the rest of mankind, but His did not mingle with sinful flesh, but only 'in the likeness of sinful flesh.'²⁷ For He took the true substance of flesh from the Virgin, but not the flesh of sin, since His flesh was not conceived or begotten of carnal concupiscence; yet it was mortal and subject to the changes of age, like the flesh of sin, but without sin.

Consequently, whatever may be the true opinion about the soul—and I am not so rash as to venture to assert at present any of these opinions, except to reject the one which holds that individual souls, for some supposed merits of previous acts, are imprisoned, so to speak, in individual bodies—it is certain that the soul of Christ is not only immortal, as others souls are by nature, but was also put to death by no sin and punished by no damnation, which may be considered as the two causes of death to the soul. Therefore, it is not in this sense that Christ could be said to be enlivened in the spirit. Doubtless, He was brought back to life in the same part in which He was put to death; therefore, this was said of the flesh: the flesh revived when the soul returned because the flesh died when the soul departed. Hence, He was said to be put to death in the flesh because He died according to the flesh, but He was enlivened in the spirit because it was by the action of that spirit, in which He came and preached as He willed, that the flesh itself rose again to life, and in that flesh He now comes to men.

Consequently, even from what was afterward said of the incredulous: 'Who shall render account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead,'²⁸ it does not necessarily follow that we should here understand those who have departed from the body. For it could be that by dead he means

²⁷ Rom. 8.3.

²⁸ 1 Peter 4.5.

unbelievers, that is, those dead in soul, of such as it says: 'Let the dead bury their dead,'²⁹ but by living those who believe in Him, who do not hear in vain the words: 'Rise, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead and Christ shall enlighten thee,'³⁰ of such the Lord Himself says: 'The hour cometh and now is when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God and they that hear shall live.'³¹ Consequently, also, when Peter continues and says: 'For this cause was the gospel preached also to the dead that they might be judged indeed according to men in the flesh, but may live according to God in the spirit,'³² he does not oblige us to think that this refers to hell. For this cause was the Gospel preached also to the dead in this life, that is, unbelievers and evil-doers, so that, when they believe, 'they may be judged indeed according to men in the flesh,' that is, in various tribulations and even in the death of the flesh, whence the same Apostle says in another place that it is 'time that judgment should begin at the house of the Lord.'³³ 'But that they may live according to God in the spirit,' because they had been put to death in the spirit when they were involved in the death of unbelief and evil-doing.

If anyone objects to this commentary on the words of Peter, or even if he does not object to it but finds it inadequate, let him seek another in terms of hell. And if he is able to free me from these perplexities which I mentioned above, so as to remove all doubt about them, let him share his knowledge with me. But in this case those words will bear a double interpretation, for my opinion cannot be accused of any fallacy. The other questions which you sent before, except the one on the possibility of seeing God in the flesh, on which I must compose a longer work, I have answered as best I could and

²⁹ Matt. 8.22; Luke 9.60.

³⁰ Eph. 5.14.

³¹ John 5.25.

³² 1 Peter 4.6.

³³ 1 Peter 4.17.

sent them by the deacon Asellus. I imagine you have received them by this time. In your latest note, which I have now answered, you asked two questions, both of which have been treated, one at length, the other more briefly, namely, about the words of the Apostle Peter and about the Lord's human soul. But the copy of your letter which contains the question about whether the substance of God can be seen corporeally, as if in spatial relations, has somehow or other gone astray at this end and cannot be found after long search. I ask you to send it again, if it is not too much trouble.

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