

Augustine of Hippo:

The Confessions (Book V) (397-400 A.D.)

He describes the twenty-ninth year of his age, in which, having discovered the fallacies of the Manichæans, he professed rhetoric at Rome and Milan. Having heard Ambrose, he begins to come to himself.

Chapter 1. That It Becomes the Soul to Praise God, and to Confess Unto Him.

1. Accept the sacrifice of my confessions by the agency of my tongue, which You have formed and quickened, that it may confess to Your name; and heal Thou all my bones, and let them say, Lord, who is like You? For neither does he who confesses to You teach You what may be passing within him, because a closed heart does not exclude Your eye, nor does man's hardness of heart repulse Your hand, but You dissolve it when You will, either in pity or in vengeance, and there is no One who can hide himself from Your heart. But let my soul praise You, that it may love You; and let it confess Your own mercies to You, that it may praise You. Your whole creation ceases not, nor is it silent in Your praises — neither the spirit of man, by the voice directed unto You, nor animal nor corporeal things, by the voice of those meditating thereon; so that our souls may from their weariness arise towards You, leaning on those things which You have made, and passing on to You, who hast made them wonderfully and there is there refreshment and true strength.

Chapter 2. On the Vanity of Those Who Wished to Escape the Omnipotent God.

2. Let the restless and the unjust depart and flee from You. You both see them and distinguish the shadows. And lo! All things with them are fair, yet they themselves are foul. And how have they injured You? Or in what have they disgraced Your government, which is just and perfect from heaven even to the lowest parts of the earth. For whither fled they when they fled from Your presence? Or where do You not find them? But they fled that they might not see You seeing them, and blinded might stumble against You; Genesis 16:13-14 since You forsake nothing that You have made — that the unjust might stumble against You, and justly be hurt, withdrawing themselves from Your gentleness, and stumbling against Your uprightness, and falling upon their own roughness. Forsooth, they know not that You are everywhere whom no place encompasses, and that You alone are near even to those that remove far from You. Let them, then, be converted and seek You; because not as they have forsaken their Creator have You forsaken Your creature. Let them be converted and seek You; and behold, You are there in their hearts, in the hearts of those who confess to You, and cast themselves upon You, and weep on Your bosom after their obdurate ways, even Thou gently wiping away their tears. And they weep the more, and rejoice in weeping, since Thou, O Lord, not man, flesh and blood, but Thou, Lord, who made, remakeest and comfortest them. And where was I when I was seeking You? And You were before me, but I had gone away even from myself; nor did I find myself, much less You!

Chapter 3. Having Heard Faustus, the Most Learned Bishop of the Manichæans, He Discerns that God, the Author Both of Things Animate and Inanimate, Chiefly Has Care for the Humble.

3. Let me lay bare before my God that twenty-ninth year of my age. There had at this time come to Carthage a certain bishop of the Manichæans, by name Faustus, a great snare of the devil, and in any were entangled by him through the allurement of his smooth speech; the which, although I did commend, yet could I separate from the truth of those things which I was eager to learn. Nor did I esteem the small dish of oratory so much as the science, which this their so praised Faustus placed before me to feed upon. Fame, indeed, had before spoken of him to me, as most skilled in all becoming learning, and pre-eminently skilled in the liberal sciences. And as I had read and retained in memory many injunctions of the philosophers, I used to compare some teachings of theirs with those long fables of the Manichæans and the former things which they declared, who could only prevail so far as to estimate this lower world, while its lord they could by no means find out, Wisdom 13:9 seemed to me the more probable. For You are great, O Lord, and hast respect unto the lowly, but the proud You know afar off. Nor do You draw near but to the contrite heart, nor are You found by the proud, — not even could they number by cunning skill the stars and the sand, and measure the starry regions, and trace the courses of the planets.

4. For with their understanding and the capacity which You have bestowed upon them they search out these things; and much have they found out, and foretold many years before — the eclipses of those luminaries, the sun and moon, on what day, at what hour, and from how many particular points they were likely to come. Nor did their calculation fail them; and it came to pass even as they foretold. And they wrote down the rules found out, which are read at this day; and from these others foretell in what year and in what month of the year, and on what day of the month, and at what hour of the day, and at what quarter of its light, either moon or sun is to be eclipsed, and thus it shall be even as it is foretold. And men who are ignorant of these things marvel and are amazed, and they that know them exult and are exalted; and by an impious pride, departing from You, and forsaking Your light, they foretell a failure of the sun's light which is likely to occur so long before, but see not their own, which is now present. For they seek not religiously whence they have the ability where-with they seek out these things. And finding that You have made them, they give not themselves up to You, that You may preserve what You have made, nor sacrifice themselves to You, even such as they have made themselves to be; nor do they slay their own pride, as fowls of the air, nor their own curiosities, by which (like the fishes of the sea) they wander over the unknown paths of the abyss, nor their own extravagance, as the beasts of the field, that Thou, Lord, a consuming fire, Deuteronomy 4:24 may burn up their lifeless cares and renew them immortally.

5. But the way — Your Word, John 1:3 by whom Thou made these things which they number, and themselves who number, and the sense by which they perceive what they number, and the judgment out of which they number — they knew not, and that of Your wisdom there is no number. But the Only-begotten has been made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, 1 Corinthians 1:30 and has been numbered among us, and paid tribute to Cæsar. Matthew 17:27 This way, by which they might descend to Him from themselves, they knew not; nor that through Him they might ascend unto Him. This way they knew not, and they think themselves exalted with the stars Isaiah 14:13 and shining, and lo! They fell upon the earth, Revelation 12:4 and their foolish heart was darkened. Romans 1:21 They say many true things concerning the creature; but Truth, the Artificer of the creature, they seek not with devotion, and

hence they find Him not. Or if they find Him, knowing that He is God, they glorify Him not as God, neither are they thankful, Romans 1:21 but become vain in their imaginations, and say that they themselves are wise, Romans 1:22 attributing to themselves what is Yours; and by this, with most perverse blindness, they desire to impute to You what is their own, forging lies against You who art the Truth, and changing the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things, Romans 1:23 — changing Your truth into a lie, and worshipping and serving the creature more than the Creator. Romans 1:25

6. Many truths, however, concerning the creature did I retain from these men, and the cause appeared to me from calculations, the succession of seasons, and the visible manifestations of the stars; and I compared them with the sayings of Manichæus, who in his frenzy has written most extensively on these subjects, but discovered not any account either of the solstices, or the equinoxes, the eclipses of the luminaries, or anything of the kind I had learned in the books of secular philosophy. But therein I was ordered to believe, and yet it corresponded not with those rules acknowledged by calculation and my own sight, but was far different.

Chapter 4. That the Knowledge of Terrestrial and Celestial Things Does Not Give Happiness, But the Knowledge of God Only.

7. Does, then, O Lord God of truth, whosoever knows those things therefore please You? For unhappy is the man who knows all those things, but knows You not; but happy is he who knows You, though these he may not know. But he who knows both You and them is not the happier on account of them, but is happy on account of You only, if knowing You he glorify You as God, and gives thanks, and becomes not vain in his thoughts. Romans 1:21 But as he is happier who knows how to possess a tree, and for the use thereof renders thanks to You, although he may not know how many cubits high it is, or how wide it spreads, than he that measures it and counts all its branches, and neither owns it nor knows or loves its Creator; so a just man, whose is the entire world of wealth, and who, as having nothing, yet possesses all things 2 Corinthians 6:10 by cleaving unto You, to whom all things are subservient, though he know not even the circles of the Great Bear, yet it is foolish to doubt but that he may verily be better than he who can measure the heavens, and number the stars, and weigh the elements, but is forgetful of You, who hast set in order all things in number, weight, and measure. Wisdom 11:20

Chapter 5. Of Manichæus Pertinaciously Teaching False Doctrines, and Proudly Arrogating to Himself the Holy Spirit.

8. But yet who was it that ordered Manichæus to write on these things likewise, skill in which was not necessary to piety? For You have told man to behold piety and wisdom, of which he might be in ignorance although having a complete knowledge of these other things; but since, knowing not these things, he yet most impudently dared to teach them, it is clear that he had no acquaintance with piety. For even when we have a knowledge of these worldly matters, it is folly to make a profession of them; but confession to You is piety. It was therefore with this view that this straying one spoke much of these matters, that, standing convicted by those who had in truth learned them, the understanding that he really had in those more

difficult things might be made plain. For he wished not to be lightly esteemed, but went about trying to persuade men that the Holy Ghost, the Comforter and Enricher of Your faithful ones, was with full authority personally resident in him. When, therefore, it was discovered that his teaching concerning the heavens and stars, and the motions of sun and moon, was false, though these things do not relate to the doctrine of religion, yet his sacrilegious arrogance would become sufficiently evident, seeing that not only did he affirm things of which he knew nothing, but also perverted them, and with such egregious vanity of pride as to seek to attribute them to himself as to a divine being.

9. For when I hear a Christian brother ignorant of these things, or in error concerning them, I can bear with patience to see that man hold to his opinions; nor can I apprehend that any want of knowledge as to the situation or nature of this material creation can be injurious to him, so long as he does not entertain belief in anything unworthy of You, O Lord, the Creator of all. But if he conceives it to pertain to the form of the doctrine of piety, and presumes to affirm with great obstinacy that whereof he is ignorant, therein lies the injury. And yet even a weakness such as this in the dawn of faith is borne by our Mother Charity, till the new man may grow up unto a perfect man, and not be carried about with every wind of doctrine. Ephesians 4:13-14 But in him who thus presumed to be at once the teacher, author, head, and leader of all whom he could induce to believe this, so that all who followed him believed that they were following not a simple man only, but Your Holy Spirit, who would not judge that such great insanity, when once it stood convicted of false teaching, should be abhorred and utterly cast off? But I had not yet clearly ascertained whether the changes of longer and shorter days and nights, and day and night itself, with the eclipses of the greater lights, and whatever of the like kind I had read in other books, could be expounded consistently with his words. Should I have found myself able to do so, there would still have remained a doubt in my mind whether it were so or no, although I might, on the strength of his reputed godliness, rest my faith on his authority.

Chapter 6. Faustus Was Indeed an Elegant Speaker, But Knew Nothing of the Liberal Sciences.

10. And for nearly the whole of those nine years during which, with unstable mind, I had been their follower, I had been looking forward with but too great eagerness for the arrival of this same Faustus. For the other members of the sect whom I had chanced to light upon, when unable to answer the questions I raised, always bade me look forward to his coming, when, by discoursing with him, these, and greater difficulties if I had them, would be most easily and amply cleared away. When at last he did come, I found him to be a man of pleasant speech, who spoke of the very same things as they themselves did, although more fluently, and in better language. But of what profit to me was the elegance of my cup-bearer, since he offered me not the more precious draught for which I thirsted? My ears were already satiated with similar things; neither did they appear to me more conclusive, because better expressed; nor true, because oratorical; nor the spirit necessarily wise, because the face was comely and the language eloquent. But they who extolled him to me were not competent judges; and therefore, as he was possessed of suavity of speech, he appeared to them to be prudent and wise. Another sort of persons, however, was, I was aware, suspicious even of truth itself, if enunciated in smooth and flowing language. But me, O my God, You had already instructed by wonderful and mysterious ways, and therefore I believe that You instructed me because it is truth; nor of truth is there any other teacher — where or whencesoever it may shine upon us — but You. From You, therefore, I had now learned, that because a thing is eloquently expressed, it

should not of necessity seem to be true; nor, because uttered with stammering lips, should it be false nor, again, perforce true, because unskilfully delivered; nor consequently untrue, because the language is fine; but that wisdom and folly are as food both wholesome and unwholesome, and courtly or simple words as town-made or rustic vessels — and both kinds of food may be served in either kind of dish.

11. That eagerness, therefore, with which I had so long waited for this man was in truth delighted with his action and feeling when disputing, and the fluent and apt words with which he clothed his ideas. I was therefore filled with joy, and joined with others (and even exceeded them) in exalting and praising him. It was, however, a source of annoyance to me that I was not allowed at those meetings of his auditors to introduce and impart any of those questions that troubled me in familiar exchange of arguments with him. When I might speak, and began, in conjunction with my friends, to engage his attention at such times as it was not unseemingly for him to enter into a discussion with me, and had mooted such questions as perplexed me, I discovered him first to know nothing of the liberal sciences save grammar, and that only in an ordinary way. Having, however, read some of Tully's Orations, a very few books of Seneca and some of the poets, and such few volumes of his own sect as were written coherently in Latin, and being day by day practised in speaking, he so acquired a sort of eloquence, which proved the more delightful and enticing in that it was under the control of ready tact, and a sort of native grace. Is it not even as I recall, O Lord my God, Thou judge of my conscience? My heart and my memory are laid before You, who at that time directed me by the inscrutable mystery of Your Providence, and set before my face those vile errors of mine, in order that I might see and loathe them.

Chapter 7. Clearly Seeing the Fallacies of the Manichæans, He Retires from Them, Being Remarkably Aided by God.

12. For when it became plain to me that he was ignorant of those arts in which I had believed him to excel, I began to despair of his clearing up and explaining all the perplexities which harassed me: though ignorant of these, however, he might still have held the truth of piety, had he not been a Manichæan. For their books are full of lengthy fables concerning the heaven and stars, the sun and moon, and I had ceased to think him able to decide in a satisfactory manner what I ardently desired — whether, on comparing these things with the calculations I had read elsewhere, the explanations contained in the works of Manichæus were preferable, or at any rate equally sound? But when I proposed that these subjects should be deliberated upon and reasoned out, he very modestly did not dare to endure the burden. For he was aware that he had no knowledge of these things, and was not ashamed to confess it. For he was not one of those loquacious persons, many of whom I had been troubled with, who covenanted to teach me these things, and said nothing; but this man possessed a heart, which, though not right towards You, yet was not altogether false towards himself. For he was not altogether ignorant of his own ignorance, nor would he without due consideration be inveigled in a controversy, from which he could neither draw back nor extricate himself fairly. And for that I was even more pleased with him, for more beautiful is the modesty of an ingenuous mind than the acquisition of the knowledge I desired — and such I found him to be in all the more abstruse and subtle questions.

13. My eagerness after the writings of Manichæus having thus received a check, and despairing even more of their other teachers — seeing that in sundry things which puzzled me, he, so famous among them, had thus turned out — I began to occupy myself with him in the study of that literature which he also much affected, and which I, as Professor of Rhetoric, was then engaged in teaching the young Carthaginian students, and in reading with him either what he expressed a wish to hear, or I deemed suited to his bent of mind. But all my endeavours by which I had concluded to improve in that sect, by acquaintance with that man, came completely to an end: not that I separated myself altogether from them, but, as one who could find nothing better, I determined in the meantime upon contenting myself with what I had in any way lighted upon, unless, by chance, something more desirable should present itself. Thus that Faustus, who had entrapped so many to their death — neither willing nor witting it — now began to loosen the snare in which I had been taken. For Your hands, O my God, in the hidden design of Your Providence, did not desert my soul; and out of the blood of my mother's heart, through the tears that she poured out by day and by night, was a sacrifice offered unto You for me; and by marvellous ways did Thou deal with me. Joel 2:26 It was Thou, O my God, who did it, for the steps of a man are ordered by the Lord, and He shall dispose his way. Or how can we procure salvation but from Your hand, remaking what it has made?

Chapter 8. He Sets Out for Rome, His Mother in Vain Lamenting It.

14. You dealt with me, therefore, that I should be persuaded to go to Rome, and teach there rather what I was then teaching at Carthage. And how I was persuaded to do this, I will not fail to confess unto You; for in this also the profoundest workings of Your wisdom, and Your ever present mercy to usward, must be pondered and avowed. It was not my desire to go to Rome because greater advantages and dignities were guaranteed me by the friends who persuaded me into this — although even at this period I was influenced by these considerations — but my principal and almost sole motive was, that I had been informed that the youths studied more quietly there, and were kept under by the control of more rigid discipline, so that they did not capriciously and impudently rush into the school of a master not their own, into whose presence they were forbidden to enter unless with his consent. At Carthage, on the contrary, there was among the scholars a shameful and intemperate license. They burst in rudely, and, with almost furious gesticulations, interrupt the system which any one may have instituted for the good of his pupils. Many outrages they perpetrate with astounding phlegm, which would be punishable by law were they not sustained by custom; that custom showing them to be the more worthless, in that they now do, as according to law, what by Your unchangeable law will never be lawful. And they fancy they do it with impunity, whereas the very blindness whereby they do it is their punishment, and they suffer far greater things than they do. The manners, then, which as a student I would not adopt, I was compelled as a teacher to submit to from others; and so I was too glad to go where all who knew anything about it assured me that similar things were not done. But You, my refuge and my portion in the land of the living, while at Carthage goaded me, so that I might thereby be withdrawn from it, and exchange my worldly habitation for the preservation of my soul; while at Rome You offered me enticements by which to attract me there, by men enchanted with this dying life — the one doing insane actions, and the other making assurances of vain things; and, in order to correct my footsteps, secretly employed their and my perversity. For both they who disturbed my tranquillity were blinded by a shameful madness, and they who allured me elsewhere smacked of the earth. And I, who hated real misery here, sought fictitious happiness there.

15. But the cause of my going thence and going there, You, O God, knew, yet revealed it not, either to me or to my mother, who grievously lamented my journey, and went with me as far as the sea. But I deceived her, when she violently restrained me either that she might retain me or accompany me, and I pretended that I had a friend whom I could not quit until he had a favourable wind to set sail. And I lied to my mother — and such a mother!— and got away. For this also You have in mercy pardoned me, saving me, thus replete with abominable pollutions, from the waters of the sea, for the water of Your grace, whereby, when I was purified, the fountains of my mother's eyes should be dried, from which for me she day by day watered the ground under her face. And yet, refusing to go back without me, it was with difficulty I persuaded her to remain that night in a place quite close to our ship, where there was an oratory in memory of the blessed Cyprian. That night I secretly left, but she was not backward in prayers and weeping. And what was it, O Lord, that she, with such an abundance of tears, was asking of You, but that You would not permit me to sail? But You, mysteriously counselling and hearing the real purpose of her desire, granted not what she then asked, in order to make me what she was ever asking. The wind blew and filled our sails, and withdrew the shore from our sight; and she, wild with grief, was there on the morrow, and filled Your ears with complaints and groans, which You disregarded; while, by the means of my longings, You were hastening me on to the cessation of all longing, and the gross part of her love to me was whipped out by the just lash of sorrow. But, like all mothers — though even more than others — she loved to have me with her, and knew not what joy You were preparing for her by my absence. Being ignorant of this, she did weep and mourn, and in her agony was seen the inheritance of Eve, — seeking in sorrow what in sorrow she had brought forth. And yet, after accusing my perfidy and cruelty, she again continued her intercessions for me with You, returned to her accustomed place, and I to Rome.

Chapter 9. Being Attacked by Fever, He is in Great Danger.

16. And behold, there was I received by the scourge of bodily sickness, and I was descending into hell burdened with all the sins that I had committed, both against You, myself, and others, many and grievous, over and above that bond of original sin whereby we all die in Adam. 1 Corinthians 15:22 For none of these things had Thou forgiven me in Christ, neither had He abolished by His cross the enmity which, by my sins, I had incurred with You. For how could He, by the crucifixion of a phantasm, which I supposed Him to be? As true, then, was the death of my soul, as that of His flesh appeared to me to be untrue; and as true the death of His flesh as the life of my soul, which believed it not, was false. The fever increasing, I was now passing away and perishing. For had I then gone hence, whither should I have gone but into the fiery torments meet for my misdeeds, in the truth of Your ordinance? She was ignorant of this, yet, while absent, prayed for me. But You, everywhere present, hearkened to her where she was, and had pity upon me where I was, that I should regain my bodily health, although still frenzied in my sacrilegious heart. For all that peril did not make me wish to be baptized, and I was better when, as a lad, I entreated it of my mother's piety, as I have already related and confessed. But I had grown up to my own dishonour, and all the purposes of Your medicine I madly derided, who would not suffer me, though such a one, to die a double death. Had my mother's heart been smitten with this wound, it never could have been cured. For I cannot sufficiently express the love she had for me, nor how she now travailed for me in the spirit with a far keener anguish than when she bore me in the flesh.

17. I cannot conceive, therefore, how she could have been healed if such a death of mine had transfixed

the bowels of her love. Where then would have been her so earnest, frequent, and unintermitted prayers to You alone? But could Thou, most merciful God, despise the contrite and humble heart of that pure and prudent widow, so constant in almsdeeds, so gracious and attentive to Your saints, not permitting one day to pass without oblation at Your altar, twice a day, at morning and even-tide, coming to Your church without intermission — not for vain gossiping, nor old wives' fables, 1 Timothy 5:10 but in order that she might listen to You in Your sermons, and Thou to her in her prayers? Could You— You by whose gift she was such — despise and disregard without succouring the tears of such a one, wherewith she entreated You not for gold or silver, nor for any changing or fleeting good, but for the salvation of the soul of her son? By no means, Lord. Assuredly You were near, and were hearing and doing in that method in which You had predetermined that it should be done. Far be it from You that Thou should delude her in those visions and the answers she had from You — some of which I have spoken of, and others not, — which she kept Luke 2:19 in her faithful breast, and, always petitioning, pressed upon You as Your autograph. For Thou, because Your mercy endures for ever, condescendest to those whose debts You have pardoned, to become likewise a debtor by Your promises.

Chapter 10. When He Had Left the Manichæans, He Retained His Depraved Opinions Concerning Sin and the Origin of the Saviour.

18. You restored me then from that illness, and made sound the son of Your hand-maid meanwhile in body, that he might live for You, to endow him with a higher and more enduring health. And even then at Rome I joined those deluding and deluded saints; not their hearers only — of the number of whom was he in whose house I had fallen ill, and had recovered — but those also whom they designate The Elect. For it still seemed to me that it was not we that sin, but that I know not what other nature sinned in us. And it gratified my pride to be free from blame and, after I had committed any fault, not to acknowledge that I had done any —that You might heal my soul because it had sinned against You; but I loved to excuse it, and to accuse something else (I know not what) which was with me, but was not I. But assuredly it was wholly I, and my impiety had divided me against myself; and that sin was all the more incurable in that I did not deem myself a sinner. And execrable iniquity it was, O God omnipotent, that I would rather have You to be overcome in me to my destruction, than myself of You to salvation! Not yet, therefore, had Thou set a watch before my mouth, and kept the door of my lips, that my heart might not incline to wicked speeches, to make excuses of sins, with men that work iniquity — and, therefore, was I still united with their Elect.

19. But now, hopeless of making proficiency in that false doctrine, even those things with which I had decided upon contenting myself, providing that I could find nothing better, I now held more loosely and negligently. For I was half inclined to believe that those philosophers whom they call Academics were more sagacious than the rest, in that they held that we ought to doubt everything, and ruled that man had not the power of comprehending any truth; for so, not yet realizing their meaning, I also was fully persuaded that they thought just as they are commonly held to do. And I did not fail frankly to restrain in my host that assurance which I observed him to have in those fictions of which the works of Manichæus are full. Notwithstanding, I was on terms of more intimate friendship with them than with others who were not of this heresy. Nor did I defend it with my former ardour; still my familiarity with that sect (many of them being concealed in Rome) made me slower to seek any other way — particularly since I was

hopeless of finding the truth, from which in Your Church, O Lord of heaven and earth, Creator of all things visible and invisible, they had turned me aside — and it seemed to me most unbecoming to believe You to have the form of human flesh, and to be bounded by the bodily lineaments of our members. And because, when I desired to meditate on my God, I knew not what to think of but a mass of bodies (for what was not such did not seem to me to be), this was the greatest and almost sole cause of my inevitable error.

20. For hence I also believed evil to be a similar sort of substance, and to be possessed of its own foul and misshapen mass — whether dense, which they denominated earth, or thin and subtle, as is the body of the air, which they fancy some malignant spirit crawling through that earth. And because a piety— such as it was — compelled me to believe that the good God never created any evil nature, I conceived two masses, the one opposed to the other, both infinite, but the evil the more contracted, the good the more expansive. And from this mischievous commencement the other profanities followed on me. For when my mind tried to revert to the Catholic faith, I was cast back, since what I had held to be the Catholic faith was not so. And it appeared to me more devout to look upon You, my God — to whom I make confession of Your mercies — as infinite, at least, on other sides, although on that side where the mass of evil was in opposition to You I was compelled to confess You finite, that if on every side I should conceive You to be confined by the form of a human body. And better did it seem to me to believe that no evil had been created by You — which to me in my ignorance appeared not only some substance, but a bodily one, because I had no conception of the mind excepting as a subtle body, and that diffused in local spaces — than to believe that anything could emanate from You of such a kind as I considered the nature of evil to be. And our very Saviour Himself, also, Your only-begotten, I believed to have been reached forth, as it were, for our salvation out of the lump of Your most effulgent mass, so as to believe nothing of Him but what I was able to imagine in my vanity. Such a nature, then, I thought could not be born of the Virgin Mary without being mingled with the flesh; and how that which I had thus figured to myself could be mingled without being contaminated, I saw not. I was afraid, therefore, to believe Him to be born in the flesh, lest I should be compelled to believe Him contaminated by the flesh. Now will Your spiritual ones blandly and lovingly smile at me if they shall read these my confessions; yet such was I.

Chapter 11. Helpidius Disputed Well Against the Manichæans as to the Authenticity of the New Testament.

21. Furthermore, whatever they had censured in Your Scriptures I thought impossible to be defended; and yet sometimes, indeed, I desired to confer on these several points with some one well learned in those books, and to try what he thought of them. For at this time the words of one Helpidius, speaking and disputing face to face against the said Manichæans, had begun to move me even at Carthage, in that he brought forth things from the Scriptures not easily withstood, to which their answer appeared to me feeble. And this answer they did not give forth publicly, but only to us in private — when they said that the writings of the New Testament had been tampered with by I know not whom, who were desirous of ingrafting the Jewish law upon the Christian faith; but they themselves did not bring forward any uncorrupted copies. But I, thinking of corporeal things, very much ensnared and in a measure stifled, was oppressed by those masses; panting under which for the breath of Your Truth, I was not able to breathe it pure and undefiled.

Chapter 12. Professing Rhetoric at Rome, He Discovers the Fraud of His Scholars.

22. Then began I assiduously to practise that for which I came to Rome— the teaching of rhetoric; and first to bring together at my home some to whom, and through whom, I had begun to be known; when, behold, I learned that other offenses were committed in Rome which I had not to bear in Africa. For those subvertings by abandoned young men were not practised here, as I had been informed; yet, suddenly, said they, to evade paying their master's fees, many of the youths conspire together, and remove themselves to another — breakers of faith, who, for the love of money, set a small value on justice. These also my heart hated, though not with a perfect hatred; for, perhaps, I hated them more in that I was to suffer by them, than for the illicit acts they committed. Such of a truth are base persons, and they are unfaithful to You, loving these transitory mockeries of temporal things, and vile gain, which begrimes the hand that lays hold on it; and embracing the fleeting world, and scorning You, who abides, and invites to return, and pardons the prostituted human soul when it returns to You. And now I hate such crooked and perverse men, although I love them if they are to be corrected so as to prefer the learning they obtain to money, and to learning You, O God, the truth and fullness of certain good and most chaste peace. But then was the wish stronger in me for my own sake not to suffer them evil, than was the wish that they should become good for Yours.

Chapter 13. He is Sent to Milan, that He, About to Teach Rhetoric, May Be Known by Ambrose.

23. When, therefore, they of Milan had sent to Rome to the prefect of the city, to provide them with a teacher of rhetoric for their city, and to dispatch him at the public expense, I made interest through those identical persons, drunk with Manichæan vanities, to be freed from whom I was going away — neither of us, however, being aware of it — that Symmachus, the then prefect, having proved me by proposing a subject, would send me. And to Milan I came, unto Ambrose the bishop, known to the whole world as among the best of men, Your devout servant; whose eloquent discourse did at that time strenuously dispense unto Your people the flour of Your wheat, the gladness of Your oil, and the sober intoxication of Your wine. To him was I unknowingly led by You, that by him I might knowingly be led to You. That man of God received me like a father, and looked with a benevolent and episcopal kindness on my change of abode. And I began to love him, not at first, indeed, as a teacher of the truth — which I entirely despaired of in Your Church, — but as a man friendly to myself. And I studiously hearkened to him preaching to the people, not with the motive I should, but, as it were, trying to discover whether his eloquence came up to the fame thereof, or flowed fuller or lower than was asserted; and I hung on his words intently, but of the matter I was but as a careless and contemptuous spectator; and I was delighted with the pleasantness of his speech, more erudite, yet less cheerful and soothing in manner, than that of Faustus. Of the matter, however, there could be no comparison; for the latter was straying amid Manichæan deceptions, while the former was teaching salvation most soundly. But salvation is far from the wicked, such as I then stood before him; and yet I was drawing nearer gradually and unconsciously.

Chapter 14. Having Heard the Bishop, He Perceives the Force of the Catholic Faith, Yet Doubts, After the Manner of the Modern Academics.

24. For although I took no trouble to learn what he spoke, but only to hear how he spoke (for that empty care alone remained to me, despairing of a way accessible for man to You), yet, together with the words which I prized, there came into my mind also the things about which I was careless; for I could not separate them. And while I opened my heart to admit how skilfully he spoke, there also entered with it, but gradually, and how truly he spoke! For first, these things also had begun to appear to me to be defensible; and the Catholic faith, for which I had fancied nothing could be said against the attacks of the Manichæans, I now conceived might be maintained without presumption; especially after I had heard one or two parts of the Old Testament explained, and often allegorically — which when I accepted literally, I was killed spiritually. Many places, then, of those books having been expounded to me, I now blamed my despair in having believed that no reply could be made to those who hated and derided the Law and the Prophets. Yet I did not then see that for that reason the Catholic way was to be held because it had its learned advocates, who could at length, and not irrationally, answer objections; nor that what I held ought therefore to be condemned because both sides were equally defensible. For that way did not appear to me to be vanquished; nor yet did it seem to me to be victorious.

25. Hereupon did I earnestly bend my mind to see if in any way I could possibly prove the Manichæans guilty of falsehood. Could I have realized a spiritual substance, all their strongholds would have been beaten down, and cast utterly out of my mind; but I could not. But yet, concerning the body of this world, and the whole of nature, which the senses of the flesh can attain unto, I, now more and more considering and comparing things, judged that the greater part of the philosophers held much the more probable opinions. So, then, after the manner of the Academics (as they are supposed), doubting of everything and fluctuating between all, I decided that the Manichæans were to be abandoned; judging that, even while in that period of doubt, I could not remain in a sect to which I preferred some of the philosophers; to which philosophers, however, because they were without the saving name of Christ, I utterly refused to commit the cure of my fainting soul. I resolved, therefore, to be a catechumen in the Catholic Church, which my parents had commended to me, until something settled should manifest itself to me whither I might steer my course.

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