

BOOK IV

Manichee and Astrologer

i (1) During this same period of nine years, from my nineteenth to my twenty-eighth year, our life was one of being seduced and seducing, being deceived and deceiving (2 Tim. 3: 13), in a variety of desires. Publicly I was a teacher of the arts which they call liberal;¹ privately I professed a false religion—in the former role arrogant, in the latter superstitious, in everything vain. On the one side we pursued the empty glory of popularity, ambitious for the applause of the audience at the theatre when entering for verse competitions to win a garland of mere grass, concerned with the follies of public entertainments and unrestrained lusts. On the other side, we sought to purge ourselves of that filth by supplying food to those whose title was the Elect and Holy, so that in the workshop of their stomach they could manufacture for us angels and gods to bring us liberation.² This was how my life was spent, and these were the activities of myself and my friends who had been deceived through me and with me.

Proud people may laugh at me. As yet they have not themselves been prostrated and brought low for their soul's health by you, my God. But I shall nevertheless confess to you my shame, since it is for your praise (Ps. 105: 47). Allow me, I pray you, grant me leave to run through my memory, as it is in the present, of the past twistings of my mistaken life and to sacrifice to you 'a victim of jubilation' (Ps. 26: 6). Without you, what am I to myself but a guide to my own self-destruction? When all is well with me, what am I but an infant sucking your milk and feeding on you, 'the food that is incorruptible' (John 6: 27)? What is a human being (name anyone you may please) when he is merely a man? So let the mighty and powerful

laugh at our expense. In our weakness and indigence (Ps. 73: 21), we may make our confession to you.

ii (2) In those years I used to teach the art of rhetoric. Overcome by greed myself, I used to sell the eloquence that would overcome an opponent. Nevertheless, Lord, as you know (Ps. 68: 6), I preferred to have virtuous students (virtuous as they are commonly called). Without any resort to a trick I taught them the tricks of rhetoric, not that they should use them against the life of an innocent man, but that sometimes they might save the life of a guilty person.³ God, from far off you saw me falling about on slippery ground and in the midst of much smoke (Isa. 42: 3) discerned the spark of my integrity which in my teaching office I manifested to people who loved vanity and sought after a lie' (Ps. 4: 3).

In those years I had a woman. She was not my partner in what is called lawful marriage. I had found her in my state of wandering desire and lack of prudence. Nevertheless, she was the only girl for me, and I was faithful to her. With her I learnt by direct experience how wide a difference there is between the partnership of marriage entered into for the sake of having a family and the mutual consent of those whose love is a matter of physical sex, and for whom the birth of a child is contrary to their intention—even though, if offspring arrive, they compel their parents to love them.

(3) I also recall how, when I had decided to enter for a poetry competition at the theatre, a soothsayer of some sort sent to ask what fee I would give him to ensure victory. But I replied that I hated and abominated those vile mysteries, and that even if the crown were immortal and made of gold, I would not allow a fly to be killed to bring about my success.⁴ For in his mysteries he would be going to kill animals, and by offering these creatures in honour of daemons, his intention was to gain their support for my winning. Yet my rejection of this evil proposition was not motivated by respect for the purity which you enjoin, 'God of my heart' (Ps. 72: 26). I knew nothing about love for you, of whom I had no conception other

¹ Literature, rhetoric and dialectic, leading on to the mathematical studies of arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy; called 'liberal' because they were the mark of a cultivated gentleman.

² In Manichee texts, every meal of the Elect is a holy feeding on particles of light concealed in fruits and plants, helping to gain remission of sins for those Hearers who prepare it. Above, III. x (18).

³ Augustine formulates the principle that an advocate should not throw dust in the eyes of the court, but is entitled to require that the prosecution prove their case, even when he may think his client guilty. He holds that it is worse for an innocent person to be condemned than for a guilty person to be acquitted. The theme is already in Cicero, *De officiis* 2. 51.

⁴ Manichees wholly rejected animal sacrifices, and regarded the Old Testament requirement of such sacrifices as one of the stronger arguments against its authority.

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than of physical objects luminous with light. In sighing after such fictions does not the soul 'commit fornication against you' (Ps. 72: 27) and 'trust in lies and feed the winds' (Prov. 10: 4)? I refused sacrifice to daemons on my behalf; yet by adherence to that superstition I sacrificed myself to them. What is it to 'feed the winds' if not to feed the spirits, that is, by one's errors to become an object of delight and derision to them?

iii (4) On the same ground I did not cease openly to consult those impostors called astrologers, because they offered, so to speak, no sacrifices, and no prayers were addressed to any spirit for the purpose of divining the future. Yet a true Christian piety consistently rejects and condemns this art. It is good to make confession to you, Lord, and to say 'Have mercy on me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against you' (Ps. 40: 5; 91: 2). I must not abuse your mercy so as to make it a licence for sin (Ecclesi. 1: 5; 2: 1), but remember the Lord's saying 'Look, you are made whole, now do not sin, lest something worse happen to you' (John 5: 14). Astrologers try to destroy this entire saving doctrine when they say: 'The reason for your sinning is determined by the heaven', and 'Venus or Saturn or Mars was responsible for this act'.⁵ They make a man not in the least responsible for his faults, but mere flesh and blood and putrid pride, so that the blame lies with the Creator and orderer of the heaven and stars. And who is this but our God, sweetness and source of justice, who 'will render to every man according to his works, and does not despise a contrite and humble heart' (Rom. 2: 6; Ps. 50: 19).

(5) At that time there was a man of good judgement, very skilled in the art of medicine and in that respect of high reputation.⁶ By virtue of his office as proconsul, not as a medical expert, he had with his own hand placed the crown in the poetry contest upon my sick head; for you alone are the healer of the disease that afflicted

⁵ Plotinus (2. 3. 6) condemns the utter irrationality of supposing Mars or Venus responsible for adulteries.

⁶ Helvius Vindicianus, named in VII. vi (8), was physician to the emperor Valentinian I, and a well-known medical authority of the time, author of textbooks. His rejection of astrology and divination was not characteristic of ancient physicians, who could normally consult almanacs or employ witch's spells before treating patients. Vindicianus held office as proconsul c.379–82; a change of career not unparalleled at this time. Symmachus (*CP*. I. 66) records an eminent physician Gelasius promoted to take charge of revenue for imperial estates in Africa in the year 380.

me, you who resist the proud but give grace to the humble (1 Pet. 5: 5; Jas. 4: 6). Nevertheless even by means of that old man you did not fail to help me or miss the opportunity of bringing healing to my soul. I came to know him well and became an assiduous and regular listener to his conversation; although his prose style was not highly cultured, his opinions were lively and expressed in a delightful and serious manner. From my remarks he discovered that I was addicted to the books of those who cast horoscopes. In a kind and fatherly way he advised me to throw them away and not to waste on that nonsense the care and labour required for useful matters. He told me that he had himself studied astrology so far that in his early years he had intended to take it up formally as a way of earning his living, saying that if he had the capacity to understand Hippocrates, he would be able to understand these books also. Nevertheless he had given up the subject and pursued medicine for the simple reason that he discovered astrology to be utterly bogus. Being a serious-minded person, he did not wish to make a living out of deceiving people. 'But you', he said, 'have the profession of a teacher of rhetoric, by which you earn your living in human society. You are pursuing this delusory subject in your free time, not out of any necessity to raise additional income. You should be the more ready to believe my view of the matter, considering that I worked hard to acquire so thorough a knowledge of astrology as to wish to earn my living exclusively from this source.'

I asked him why it was that many of their forecasts turned out to be correct. He replied that the best answer he could give was the power apparent in lots, a power everywhere diffused in the nature of things. So when someone happens to consult the pages of a poet whose verses and intention are concerned with a quite different subject, in a wonderful way a verse often emerges appropriate to the decision under discussion. He used to say that it was no wonder if from the human soul, by some higher instinct that does not know what goes on within itself, some utterance emerges not by art but by 'chance' which is in sympathy with the affairs or actions of the inquirer.⁷

⁷ Vindicianus' arguments failed to dissuade Augustine (VII. vi (8)). His position was not that a correct astrological prediction is the result of a purely random chance, but that 'chance' is our name for a cause we do not know, and in this instance the correctness of prediction is the result of the internal sympathy of all parts of the cosmos. So also

(6) This instruction, either by him or through him, you gave me. The doubt which you imprinted in my memory I was later to follow up with a personal investigation. But at that time neither he nor my dearest friend Nebridius (a thoroughly good and entirely chaste young man who thought all kinds of divination ridiculous)⁸ was able to persuade me to abandon it. Their argument impressed me less than the authority of the writers on astrology. Moreover, I had not yet found the certain proof for which I was seeking, by which it would be clear beyond doubt that the true forecasts given by the astrologers when consulted were uttered by chance or by luck, not from the science of studying the stars.

iv (7) During those years when first I began to teach in the town where I was born, I had come to have a friend who because of our shared interests was very close. He was my age, and we shared the flowering of youth. As a boy he had grown up with me, and we had gone to school together and played with one another. He was then not yet my friend, and when he did become so, it was less than a true friendship which is not possible unless you bond together those who cleave to one another by the love which 'is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us' (Rom. 5: 5). Nevertheless, it was a very sweet experience, welded by the fervour of our identical interests. For I had turned him away from the true faith, to which, being only young, he had no strong or profound allegiance, towards those superstitions and pernicious mythologies which were the reason for my mother's tears over me. So under my influence this man's mind was wandering astray, and my soul could not endure to be without him. But you were present, immediately at the back of those who flee from you, at once both 'God of vengeance' (Ps. 93: 1) and fount of mercies: you turn us to yourself in wonderful ways. You took the man from this life when our friendship had

Plotinus 2. 3. The poetry of Virgil was often used for sortilege; Christians used the Bible, to the anxiety of bishops including Augustine, though it was crucial in the garden at Milan, below viii. xii (29).

⁸ Nebridius became Augustine's friend during his Manichee period at Carthage; his father owned a fine estate nearby. When Augustine moved to Milan, Nebridius followed as one of the group of friends seeking to share a common life devoted to 'the love of wisdom', and returned to North Africa in 388, regretting that Augustine went back to Thagaste instead of coming to him near Carthage. His premature death (ix. iii (6) below) came about 390. Augustine found his mind intensely stimulating, putting critical questions about divination or Manichee doctrine. He shared Augustine's Milanese enthusiasm for Neoplatonism, but 'hated a short answer to a large question'.

scarcely completed a year. It had been sweet to me beyond all the sweetnesses of life that I had experienced.

(8) Who on his own can recount your praises for the experiences of his life alone (cf. Ps. 105: 2)? At that time what did you do, my God? 'How unsearchable is the abyss of your judgements' (Ps. 35: 7; Rom. 11: 33)! When he was sick with fever, for a long time he lay unconscious in a mortal sweat, and when his life was despaired of, he was baptized without his knowing it. To me this was a matter of no interest.⁹ I assumed that his soul would retain what it had received from me, not what had happened to his body while he was unconscious. But it turned out quite differently. For he recovered and was restored to health, and at once, as soon as I could speak with him (and I was able to do so as soon as he could speak, since I never left his side, and we were deeply dependent on one another), I attempted to joke with him, imagining that he too would laugh with me about the baptism which he had received when far away in mind and sense. But he had already learnt that he had received the sacrament. He was horrified at me as if I were an enemy, and with amazing and immediate frankness advised me that, if I wished to be his friend, I must stop saying this kind of thing to him. I was dumbfounded and perturbed; but I deferred telling him of all my feelings until he should get better and recover his health and strength. Then I would be able to do what I wished with him. But he was snatched away from my lunacy, so that he might be preserved with you for my consolation. After a few days, while I was absent, the fever returned, and he died.

(9) 'Grief darkened my heart' (Lam. 5: 17). Everything on which I set my gaze was death. My home town became a torture to me; my father's house a strange world of unhappiness; all that I had shared with him was without him transformed into a cruel torment. My eyes looked for him everywhere, and he was not there. I hated everything because they did not have him, nor could they now tell me 'look, he is on the way', as used to be the case when he was alive and absent from me. I had become to myself a vast problem,¹⁰ and I

⁹ Augustine's unnamed friend came of a Catholic family, evidently responsible for his baptism. To baptize an unconscious sick person (if a catechumen) was accepted in the North African Churches. Manichees rejected baptism as a superfluous and useless external act.

¹⁰ Repeated x. xxxiii (50).

questioned my soul 'Why are you sad, and why are you very distressed?' But my soul did not know what reply to give. If I had said to my soul 'Put your trust in God' (Ps. 41: 6, 12), it would have had good reason not to obey. For the very dear friend I had lost was a better and more real person than the [Manichee] phantom in which I would have been telling my soul to trust. Only tears were sweet to me, and in my 'soul's delights' (Ps. 138: 11) weeping had replaced my friend.

v (10) Now, Lord, all that belongs to the past, and with time my wound is less painful.¹¹ Can I hear from you who are the truth, and move the ear of my heart close to your mouth, so that you can explain to me why weeping is a relief to us when unhappy? Or, although present everywhere, have you thrust our misery far from you and remain in yourself (Wisd. 7: 27) while we are tossed about by successive trials? Yet if our tearful entreaties did not reach your ears, no remnant of hope would remain for us. How does it come about that out of the bitterness of life sweet fruit is picked by groaning and weeping and sighing and mourning? Does the sweetness lie in the hope that you hear us? That is certainly the case in our prayers which express the longing to reach their object. But surely that is not true of sadness and grief for what has been lost, such as overwhelmed me at that time. I had no hope that he would come back to life, and my tears did not petition for this. I merely grieved and wept. I was in misery and had lost the source of my joy. Or is weeping really a bitter thing which gives relief only when we cannot bear to think of the things which formerly we enjoyed, and which is pleasurable at the moments when we shrink from the memory of them?

vi (11) Why do I speak of these matters? Now is the time not to be putting questions but to be making confession to you. I was in misery, and misery is the state of every soul overcome by friendship with mortal things and lacerated when they are lost. Then the soul becomes aware of the misery which is its actual condition even before it loses them. At that time that was my state: I wept very bitterly and took my rest in bitterness. I was so wretched that I felt a greater attachment to my life of misery than to my dead friend. Although I wanted it to be otherwise, I was more unwilling to lose

¹¹ Echo of Ovid, *Remedium Amoris* 131.

my misery than him, and I do not know if I would have given up my life for him as the story reports of Orestes and Pylades:¹² if it is not fiction, they were willing to die for each other together, because it was worse than death to them not to be living together. But in me there had emerged a very strange feeling which was the opposite of theirs. I found myself heavily weighed down by a sense of being tired of living and scared of dying. I suppose that the more I loved him, the more hatred and fear I felt for the death which had taken him from me, as if it were my most ferocious enemy. I thought that since death had consumed him, it was suddenly going to engulf all humanity. That was, to the best of my memory, my state of mind.

Look into my heart, my God, look within. See this, as I remember it, my hope; for you cleanse me from these flawed emotions. You direct my eyes towards you and 'rescue my feet from the trap' (Ps. 24: 15). I was surprised that any other mortals were alive, since he whom I had loved as if he would never die was dead. I was even more surprised that when he was dead I was still alive, for he was my 'other self'. Someone has well said of his friend, 'He was half my soul'.¹³ I had felt that my soul and his soul were 'one soul in two bodies'.¹⁴ So my life was to me a horror. I did not wish to live with only half of myself, and perhaps the reason why I so feared death was that then the whole of my much loved friend would have died.¹⁵

vii (12) What madness not to understand how to love human beings with awareness of the human condition! How stupid man is to be unable to restrain feelings in suffering the human lot! That was my state at that time. So I boiled with anger, sighed, wept, and was at my wits' end. I found no calmness, no capacity for deliberation. I carried my lacerated and bloody soul when it was unwilling to be carried by me. I found no place where I could put it down. There was no rest in pleasant groves, nor in games or songs, nor in sweet-scented places, nor in exquisite feasts, nor in the pleasures of the bedroom and bed, nor, finally, in books and poetry. Everything was an object of horror, even light itself; all that was not he made me feel sick and was repulsive—except for groaning and tears. In them alone was there some slight relief. But when my weeping stopped,

¹² Echo of Cicero, *On Friendship* 7. 24.

¹³ Horace, *Odes* 1, 3. 8.

¹⁴ Ovid, *Tristia* 4. 4. 72; Aristotle in Diogenes Laertius 6. 1. 20.

¹⁵ In his *Revisions* (*Retr.* 2. 6. 2) Augustine censured this last sentence as declamatory rhetoric, not serious confession.

my soul felt burdened by a vast load of misery. I should have lifted myself to you, Lord, to find a cure. I knew that, but did not wish it or have the strength for it. When I thought of you, my mental image was not of anything solid and firm; it was not you but a vain phantom. My error was my god. If I attempted to find rest there for my soul, it slipped through a void and again came falling back upon me. I had become to myself a place of unhappiness in which I could not bear to be; but I could not escape from myself. Where should my heart flee to in escaping from my heart? Where should I go to escape from myself? Where is there where I cannot pursue myself? And yet I fled from my home town, for my eyes sought for him less in a place where they were not accustomed to see him. And so from the town of Thagaste I came to Carthage.¹⁶

viii (13) Time is not inert. It does not roll on through our senses without affecting us. Its passing has remarkable effects on the mind. See: it came and went 'from day to day' (Ps. 60: 9), and by its coming and going it implanted in me new hopes and other experiences to be remembering. Gradually it repaired me with delights such as I used to enjoy, and to them my grief yielded. But these delights were succeeded not by new sorrows but by the causes of new sorrows. The reason why that grief had penetrated me so easily and deeply was that I had poured out my soul on to the sand by loving a person sure to die as if he would never die. The greatest source of repair and restoration was the solace of other friends, with whom I loved what I loved as a substitute for you; and this was a vast myth and a long lie. By its adulterous caress, my mind which had 'itching ears' (2 Tim. 4: 3–4) was corrupted.

But this fable did not die for me when one of my friends died. There were other things which occupied my mind in the company of my friends: to make conversation, to share a joke, to perform mutual acts of kindness, to read together well-written books, to share in trifling and in serious matters, to disagree though without animosity—just as a person debates with himself—and in the very rarity of disagreement to find the salt of normal harmony, to teach each other something or to learn from one another, to long with impatience for those absent, to welcome them with gladness on

¹⁶ Augustine left Thagaste without telling his mother, his travel costs being paid by the rich neighbour Rumanianus. Probably there is a double allusion to the parable of the prodigal son and to Horace *Odes* II 16.19 ('what exile from home escapes himself?').

their arrival. These and other signs come from the heart of those who love and are loved and are expressed through the mouth, through the tongue, through the eyes, and a thousand gestures of delight, acting as fuel to set our minds on fire and out of many to forge unity.¹⁷

ix (14) This is what we love in friends. We love to the point that the human conscience feels guilty if we do not love the person who is loving us, and if that love is not returned—without demanding any physical response other than the marks of affectionate good will. Hence the mourning if a friend dies, the darkness of grief, and as the sweetness is turned into bitterness the heart is flooded with tears. The lost life of those who die becomes the death of those still living. Happy is the person who loves you' (Tobit 13: 18) and his friend in 'Happy is the person who loves you' (Matt. 5: 44). Though left alone, you, and his enemy because of you (Matt. 5: 44). Though left alone, he loses none dear to him; for all are dear in the one who cannot be lost. Who is that but our God, the God who made heaven and earth and filled them? By filling them he made them. (Jer. 23: 24).¹⁸ None loses you unless he abandons you, and when he abandons you where can he go or fly for refuge (Ps. 138: 7) unless it be to move from your serenity to your anger? Where can he escape from finding that your law is in his penalty? And 'your law is truth' (Ps. 118: 142) and truth is you (John 14: 6).

x (15) 'O God of hosts, turn us and show us your face, and we shall be safe' (Ps. 79: 8). For wherever the human soul turns itself, other than to you, it is fixed in sorrows, even if it is fixed upon beautiful things external to you and external to itself, which would nevertheless be nothing if they did not have their being from you. Things rise and set: in their emerging they begin as it were to be, and grow to perfection; having reached perfection, they grow old and die.¹⁹ Not everything grows old, but everything dies. So when things rise and emerge into existence, the faster they grow to be, the quicker they rush towards non-being. That is the law limiting their being. So much have you given them, namely to be parts of

¹⁷ Cicero, *On Friendship* 98.

¹⁸ Similarly I. iii (3). The Platonic axiom is that in God's creation there can be no empty gaps; all is a full continuum of levels of being. Cf. *City of God* 11. 22; 12. 2; Plotinus 3. 3. 7, especially 6. 7. 16 'Filling brings into existence'.

¹⁹ Echo of Sallust, *Jugurtha* 2. 3. Plotinus also thinks beauty can distract one from the Good (5. 5. 12).

things which do not all have their being at the same moment, but by passing away and by successiveness, they all form the whole of which they are parts. That is the way our speech is constructed by sounds which are significant. What we say would not be complete if one word did not cease to exist when it has sounded its constituent parts, so that it can be succeeded by another.

Let these transient things be the ground on which my soul praises you (Ps. 145: 2), 'God creator of all'.²⁰ But let it not become stuck in them and glued to them with love through the physical senses. For these things pass along the path of things that move towards non-existence. They rend the soul with pestilential desires; for the soul loves to be in them and take its repose among the objects of its love. But in these things there is no point of rest: they lack permanence. They flee away and cannot be followed with the bodily senses. No one can fully grasp them even while they are present. Physical perception is slow, because it is a bodily sense: its nature imposes limitations on it. It is sufficient for another purpose for which it was made. But it is not adequate to get a grip on things that are transient from the moment of the intended beginning to their intended end (cf. Ps. 138: 7). In your word, through which they are created, they hear: 'From here as far as there' (Job 38: 11).

²⁰ Ambrose's hymn, *Deus creator omnium*, from which Augustine quotes fairly frequently, c.g. below IX. xii (32); X. xxxv (52); XI. xxvii (35).

presence of the God who stands fast and abides (Ps. 101: 13, 27; 1 Pet. 1: 23).²¹

(17) Why then are you perversely following the leading of your flesh? If you turn away from it, it has to follow you. All that you experience through it is only partial; you are ignorant of the whole to which the parts belong. Yet they delight you. But if your physical perception were capable of comprehending the whole and had not, for your punishment, been justly restrained to a part of the universe, you would wish everything at present in being to pass away, so that the totality of things could provide you with greater pleasure. The words we speak you hear by the same physical perception, and you have no wish that the speaker stop at each syllable. You want him to hurry on so that other syllables may come, and you may hear the whole. That is always how it is with the sum of the elements out of which a unity is constituted, and the elements out of which it is constituted never exist all at the same moment. There would be more delight in all the elements than in individual pieces if only one had the capacity to perceive all of them. But far superior to these things is he who made all things, and he is our God. He does not pass away; nothing succeeds him.²²

xii (18) If physical objects give you pleasure, praise God for them, and return love to their Maker lest, in the things that please you, you displease him. If souls please you, they are being loved in God; for they also are mutable and acquire stability by being established in him. Otherwise they go their way and perish. In him therefore they are loved; so seize what souls you can to take with you to him, and say to them: 'Him we love; he made these things and is not far distant.' For he did not create and then depart; the things derived from him have their being in him. Look where he is—wherever there is a taste of truth. He is very close to the heart, but the heart has wandered from him. 'Return, sinners, to your heart' (Isa. 46: 8 LXX), and adhere to him who made you. Stand with him and you will stand fast. Rest in him and you will be at rest. Where are you going to along rough paths? What is the goal of your journey? The good which you love is from him. But it is only as it is related to him

²¹ The homiletic tone of this piece has affinities with Ambrose's sermon *On Isaac* (which Augustine would have heard at Milan). 'You' is not God but man.

²² The antithesis of parts and whole is paralleled in the Neoplatonist Porphyry, *Sententiae* 40.

that it is good and sweet. Otherwise it will justly become bitter, for all that comes from him is unjustly loved if he has been abandoned. With what end in view do you again and again walk along difficult and laborious paths (Wisd. 5: 7)? There is no rest where you seek it. You seek for what you seek, but it is not where you are looking for it. How can there be a happy life in the region of death, it is not there. (19) He who for us is life itself descended here and endured our death and slew it by the abundance of his life.²³ In a thunderous voice he called us to return to him, at that secret place where he came forth to us. First he came into the Virgin's womb where the human creation was married to him, so that mortal flesh should not for ever be mortal. Coming forth from thence 'as a bridegroom from his marriage bed, he bounded like a giant to run his course' (Ps. 18: 6). He did not delay, but ran crying out loud by his words, 'deeds, death, life, descent, and ascent—calling us to return to him. And he has gone from our sight that we should 'return to our heart' (Isa. 46: 8) and find him there. He went away and behold, here he is. He did not wish to remain long with us, yet he did not abandon us. He has gone to that place which he never left, 'for the world was made by him' (John 1: 10); and he was in this world, and 'came into this world to save sinners' (1 Tim. 1: 15). To him my soul is making confession, and 'he is healing it, because it was against him that it sinned' (Ps. 40: 5). 'Sons of men, how long will you be heavy at heart?' (Ps. 4: 3). Surely after the descent of life, you cannot fail to wish to ascend and live? But where will you ascend when you are 'set on high and have put your mouth in heaven?' (Ps. 72: 9). Come down so that you can ascend, and make your ascent to God. For it is by climbing up against God that you have fallen. Tell souls that they should 'weep in the valley of tears' (Ps. 83: 7). So take them with you to God, for by his Spirit you declare these things to them if you say it burning with the fire of love.

xiii (20) At that time I did not know this. I loved beautiful things of a lower order, and I was going down to the depths. I used to say to my friends: 'Do we love anything except that which is beautiful? What then is a beautiful object? And what is beauty? What is it which charms and attracts us to the things we love? It must be the

²³ Death dies—a theme in a famous sonnet of John Donne: frequent in Augustine.

grace and loveliness inherent in them, or they would in no way move us.' I gave the subject careful attention, and saw that in the bodies one should distinguish the beauty which is a kind of totality and for that reason beautiful, and another kind which is fitting and for that reason adapted to some other thing, just as part of the body is adapted to the whole to which it belongs as a shoe to a foot and like instances. This thought bubbled up in my mind like a spring from the deepest level of my heart, and I wrote *On the Beautiful and the Fitting* in two or three books, I think—you know, God, for I have forgotten. I no longer have this work; I do not know how it went astray from me.

xiv (21) What was it, Lord my God, which moved me to dedicate the work to Hierius,²⁴ the orator at Rome? I had never set eyes on him, but I loved the man for his renown as a person of high culture, and because I had heard some words of his quoted which gave me pleasure. But I loved him above all because others thought him delightful; they praised him to the skies, astonished that a Syrian previously educated in Greek eloquence could later become an admirable orator in Latin as well, and be extremely knowledgeable in the study of philosophical questions. A man can be praised and loved even though far distant from us. It would be absurd to suppose that this kind of love is transmitted from the mouth of the person praising him to the heart of the person hearing. But love in one person is infectious in kindling it in another. Hence it comes about that a person who is praised comes to be loved, when people believe that the praise comes from a sincere heart, that is, when the praise comes from one who loves him.

(22) So at that period of my life I used to love people on the basis of human judgement, not your judgement, my God, in whom no one is deceived. Yet my sentiment was different from the kind of feeling one could have about a famous charioteer or a man who has a great popular following for his combats with wild beasts. It was an altogether distinct and serious feeling, being the kind of praise I would have liked to receive myself. I would not have wanted to be praised and loved like actors, though I myself used to praise and

²⁴ Hierius was a common name in the fourth century, some of that name being philosophers and orators (one corrected the manuscripts of Quintilian). The only certainty about the Roman orator is provided by Augustine.

carnal pleasures, so also errors and false opinions contaminate life if the reasoning mind is itself flawed. That was my condition at that time. For I did not know that the soul needs to be enlightened by light from outside itself, so that it can participate in truth, because it is not itself the nature of truth. You will light my lamp, O Lord. My God you will lighten my darknesses (Ps. 17: 29), and of your fullness we have all received (John 1: 16). You are the true light who illuminates every man coming into this world (John 1: 9), because in you there is no change nor shadow caused by turning (Jas. 1: 17).

(26) I tried to approach you, but you pushed me away so that I should taste of death (Matt. 16: 28); for you resist the proud (2 Peter 5: 5). What could be worse arrogance than the amazing madness with which I asserted myself to be by nature what you are?³⁰ I was changeable and this was evident to me from the fact that I wanted to be wise and to pass from worse to better. Yet I preferred to think you mutable rather than hold that I was not what you are. That is why I was pushed away, and why you resisted my inflated pride. I was imagining corporeal shapes. I being flesh accused flesh.³¹ A 'wandering spirit' (Ps. 77: 39), I was not yet on my way back to you, but meandered on and on into things which have no being either in you or in me or in the body. They were not created for me on the ground of your truth, but were fictions invented by my vanity on the basis of the body. I used to talk to your little believers, fellow citizens of mine, from whom without knowing it I was in exile. Loquacious and inept, I used to say to them: 'Why then does the soul which God has made fall into error?' But I did not wish to hear someone saying: 'Why then does God err?' I used to argue that your unchangeable substance is forced into mistakes³² rather than confess that my mutable nature deviated by its own choice and that error is its punishment.

(27) I was about 26 or 27 years old when I wrote that work, turning over in my mind fictitious physical images. These were a strident noise in the ears of my heart, with which I was straining, sweet truth, to hear your interior melody when I was meditating on

³⁰ Manichee doctrine held that a good human soul is the very substance of God.

³¹ The alteration of all physical matter from God is central to Mani's belief.

³² The Manichee Light-deity is of limited power, and does things under necessity, not by choice: cf. XIII. xxx (45) below.

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the beautiful and the fitting. I wanted to stand still and hear you and rejoice with joy at the voice of the bridegroom (John 3: 29). But that was beyond my powers, for I was snatched away to external things by the voices of the error I espoused, and under the weight of my pride I plunged into the abyss. You did not grant joy and gladness to my hearing, nor did my bones exult, for they had not been brought to humility (Ps. 50: 10).

(28) What good did it do me that at about the age of twenty I came into my hands a work of Aristotle which they call the *Ten Categories*?³³ My teacher in rhetoric at Carthage, and others too who were reputed to be learned men, used to speak of this work with their cheeks puffed out with conceit, and at the very name I gasped with suspense as if about to read something great and divine. Yet I read it without any expositor and understood the *Categories* discussions with people who said they had understood the *Categories* only with much difficulty after the most erudite teachers had not only given oral explanations but had drawn numerous diagrams in the dust. They could tell me nothing they had learnt from these teachers which I did not already know from reading the book on my own without having anyone to explain it. The book seemed to me an extremely clear statement about substances, such as man, and what are in them, such as a man's shape, what is his quality of stature, how many feet, and his relatedness, for example whose brother he is, or where he is placed, or when he was born, or whether he is standing or sitting, or is wearing shoes or armour, or whether he is active or passive, and the innumerable things which are classified by these nine genera of which I have given some instances, or by the genus of substance itself.

(29) What help was this to me when the book was also an obstacle? Thinking that absolutely everything that exists is comprehended under the ten categories, I tried to conceive you also, my God, wonderfully simple and immutable, as if you too were a subject of which magnitude and beauty are attributes.³⁴ I thought them to be

³³ A Latin translation of the *Categories* had been made not long before Augustine's time by Marius Victorinus, on whom see below VIII. ii (3).

³⁴ Plotinus (6. 2. 3) regarded the *Categories* as a classification system for this world, inapplicable to the divine realm. He opposed the opinion (held by Alexander of Aphrodisias, c. AD 200) that the *Categories* embrace all kinds of being, sensible and intelligible. Porphyry sought a middle way by interpreting the *Categories* to be concerned not with

in you as if in a subject, as in the case of a physical body, whereas you yourself are your own magnitude and your own beauty. By contrast a body is not great and beautiful by being body; if it were less great or less beautiful, it would nevertheless still be body. My conception of you was a lie, not truth, the figments of my misery, not the permanent solidity of your supreme bliss. You had commanded and it so came about in me, that the soil would bring forth thorns and brambles for me, and that with toil I should gain my bread (Gen. 3: 18).

(30) Moreover, what advantage came to me from the fact that I had by myself read and understood all the books I could get hold of on the arts which they call liberal, at a time when I was the most wicked slave of evil lusts? I enjoyed reading them, though I did not know the source of what was true and certain in them. I had my back to the light and my face towards the things which are illuminated. So my face, by which I was enabled to see the things lit up, was not itself illuminated.³⁵ I learnt about the art of speaking and disputing, and about the dimensions of figures and music and numbers, with no great difficulty and without a teacher to instruct me. You know, Lord my God, that quick thinking and capacity for acute analysis are your gift. But that did not move me to offer them in sacrifice to you. And so these qualities were not helpful but pernicious, because I went to much pains to keep a good part of my talents under my own control. I did not dedicate my courage to you (Ps. 58: 10), but I on meretricious lusts (Luke 15: 13). What advantage did it bring me to have a good thing and not to use it well? I was not aware that these arts are very difficult to understand even for studious and intelligent people, until I tried to explain them to such people and found the student of outstanding quality was the one who did not lag behind me in my exposition.

(31) But what good did this do for me? I thought that you, Lord God and Truth, were like a luminous body of immense size and myself a bit of that body. What extraordinary perversity! But that is

metaphysics, but with purely logical questions: this enabled Porphyry to mitigate the awkwardness of the *Calogonia* for the Platonic school, and to make the strange suggestion that Aristotle's book was intended for beginners in the study of philosophy.
³⁵ Echo of Plotinus 5. 5. 7. Cf. above II. iii (6).

how I was, and I do not blush, Lord God, to confess your mercies to me and to call upon you, for at that time I was not ashamed you' like a dog before men my blasphemies and to 'bark against you' like a dog (Judith 11: 15). What profit, then, was it for me at that time that my agile mind found no difficulty in these subjects, and that without assistance from a human teacher I could elucidate extremely complicated books, when my comprehension of religion was erroneous, distorted, and shamefully sacrilegious? Or what serious harm did it cause to your little ones that their intelligence was much slower? They did not wander away far from you. In the nest of the Church they could grow like fledgelings in safety and nourish the wings of charity with the food of sound faith (Job 39: 26; Ps. 83: 4).

O Lord our God, under the covering of your wings (Exod. 19: 4) we set our hope. Protect us and bear us up. It is you who will carry us; you will bear us up from our infancy until old age (Isa. 46: 4). When you are our firm support, then it is firm indeed. But when our support rests on our own strength, it is infirmity. Our good is life with you for ever, and because we turned away from that, we became twisted. Let us now return to you that we may not be overturned. Our good is life with you and suffers no deficiency (Ps. 101: 28); for you yourself are that good. We have no fear that there is no home to which we may return because we fell from it. During our absence our house suffers no ruin; it is your eternity.³⁶

³⁶ This passage is a mosaic of biblical allusions (Ps. 16: 8; 35: 8; 62: 8; Exod. 19: 4; Isa. 46: 4). The Latin has plays on words that cannot be reproduced in translation. On God's eternity as his 'house' see XII. xv (19).