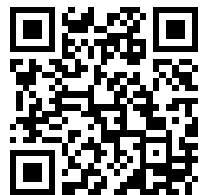


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THE WORKS OF  
SAINT AUGUSTINE

*A Translation  
for the 21st Century*

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# LETTERS

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# Letters

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***THE WORKS OF SAINT AUGUSTINE***  
**A Translation for the 21st Century**

**Part II – Letters**  
**Volume 2:**  
**Letters 100 – 155**



Augustine, Saint, Bishop of Hippo.

*THE WORKS OF SAINT AUGUSTINE*  
A Translation for the 21st Century

**Letters 100 – 155**  
(*Epistulae*)

II/2

*translation and notes by*  
Roland Teske, S.J.

*editor*  
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*In memory of*

**John E. Rotelle, O.S.A.**

*Great friend, editor, and Augustinian*



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## Introduction

The fifty-six letters contained in this volume were, with a few possible exceptions, written between 408 and 414. During these years the Donatist schism came to a head and was in principle healed by the Conference of Carthage in June of 411. In August of 410, Rome fell to Alaric's Goths, driving many of the Roman nobility to a safer haven in Africa. And in the aftermath of Rome's sack Pelagius and Caelestius passed through Africa on their way to the East, sowing the seeds of the heresy with which Augustine would do battle in one form or another until his death in 430.

In the present volume there are forty-two letters written by Augustine and one letter written by Augustine in the name of the bishops of the Council of Circa. There are also eleven letters written by other persons to Augustine, and two letters written neither to nor by Augustine. Among the letters written to Augustine, there is Letter 103 to Augustine from Nectarius, an elderly pagan from Calama, who intercedes on behalf of his fellow citizens who had committed crimes against Christians. Augustine replies in Letter 104 to Nectarius' concerns. There is also Letter 107 from Maximus and Theodore, Catholic laymen of Hippo, who had paid a visit to Macrobius, the Donatist bishop of Hippo, on behalf of Augustine. They report to Augustine on the rather cool reception they met with. There is Letter 109 from Severus, the Catholic bishop of Milevis in Numidia and friend of Augustine, in which Severus praises Augustine highly so that Augustine in Letter 110 insists that he does not deserve such praise. There is Letter 117 from Dioscorus, a young Greek in Africa who consults Augustine on the interpretation of Cicero's philosophical dialogues and receives a long answer in Letter 118, in which Augustine clearly expresses his annoyance about the sort of questions Dioscorus asked and questions the motives behind his questions. Similarly there is Letter 119 from Consentius, a Catholic layman and budding theologian from the Balearic Islands, who presents Augustine with a series of theological questions and provokes a long defense of a theological understanding of the faith in Letter 120. The Divjak Letters 11\* and 12\*, both from Consentius to Augustine, flesh out our knowledge of this curious young man. Letter 121 from Paulinus, bishop of Nola, with whom Augustine has already exchanged nearly a dozen letters, poses a series of questions on difficult passages of scripture, to which Augustine replies in Letter 149. Letter 123 is a short missive from Jerome of Bethlehem, with whom Augustine had carried similarly extensive but much more heated correspondence in a series of letters contained in the first volume of this translation.

Letter 135 from Volusian, a pagan and wealthy aristocrat, the brother of Albina and uncle of Melania the Younger, poses various objections to the Chris-

tian faith, to which Augustine replies in Letter 137. Letter 136 from Marcellinus, the imperial commissioner and close friend of Augustine, who convoked the Conference of Carthage that effectively brought an end to the Donatist schism and who was soon executed for his alleged complicity in a plot against the emperor, presents to Augustine further objections to Christianity on the part of Volusian, which Augustine answers in Letter 138. There are two letters from Macedonius, a Christian and the vicar of Africa. In Letter 152 Macedonius tells Augustine that he has granted at the bishop's request the otherwise unspecified petition of Boniface, who carried Augustine's letter, but he asks Augustine why a bishop should intercede on behalf of the guilty. Augustine replies in Letter 153 with an explanation of the role of a Catholic bishop in such matters, and Macedonius writes in Letter 154 to inform Augustine that he has granted his request and that he has read the first books of *The City of God* with great interest. Augustine replies with Letter 155 on true friendship and on true wisdom and perfect virtue. Finally, there are two letters neither from nor to Augustine. In Letter 128 Aurelius, the primate of Africa Proconsularis, and Silvanus, the primate of Numidia, write to Marcellinus, in the name of the other Catholic bishops, promising that they will observe the conditions that Marcellinus has set for the Conference of Carthage. In Letter 129 the same two primates write to Marcellinus to indicate their acceptance of the Donatist demands that all their bishops be present at the Conference of Carthage.

This volume includes three letters that Augustine called books in the *Revisions*. There is, first of all, Letter 102 to Deogratias, a priest of Carthage, which he called: *Six Questions in Answer to the Pagans*. Secondly, there is Letter 140 to Honoratus, a friend and former Manichee, for whom he had written *The Advantage of Believing*. Letter 140 is also called *The Grace of the New Testament*. Finally, there is Letter 147 to Paulina, which Augustine called: *Seeing God*. In the *Revisions* Letter 148 to Fortunian, the bishop of Sicca, is linked to Letter 147. Letter 148, which Augustine called a memorandum, deals with the same problem as Letter 147, namely, whether in the resurrection God will be seen by bodily eyes.

Letter 102 affords us an interesting insight into typical objections raised by intelligent pagans against the Christian faith and Augustine's equally intelligent handling of them. Letter 140 is an artfully crafted work written early in Augustine's struggle with the recently emerged Pelagian teaching that emphasized human self-sufficiency and minimized the need for the grace of God. Letter 147 presents a brilliant analysis of seeing with the eyes of the body and seeing with the eyes of the mind in relation to believing on the basis of authority, whether human or divine. Lurking in the background of Letters 147 and 148 is the view, which Augustine finds at least suspect, if not plainly erroneous, that in the resurrection we will see God with the eyes of the body, even with the eyes of the risen and spiritual body.

A large number of these letters are related to the Donatist schism, which Augustine had been battling since prior to his ordination to the episcopacy. In Letter 100, for example, Augustine writes to Donatus, the proconsul of Africa, asking him to punish the Donatists, but not to put them to death. Letter 105 is an open letter to the Donatists in which Augustine urges them to return to the Catholic unity. Letters 106 and 108 are written to Augustine's counterpart, the Donatist bishop of Hippo, complaining that Macrobius was planning to rebaptize a Catholic subdeacon and explaining why the Catholic Church objects to the repetition of baptism. Letter 107 from Maximus and Theodore to Augustine reports on their visit to Macrobius. Besides Letters 128 and 129 mentioned above, Letter 133 from Augustine to Marcellinus begs the imperial commissioner not to impose capital punishment on the Donatists who have confessed to their crimes. Letter 134 to Apringius, the proconsul and brother of Marcellinus, again pleads that the Donatist criminals not be put to death. Letter 139 from Augustine to Marcellinus asks that the imperial commissioner make public the proceedings of the conference and be lenient in imposing punishment on the Donatists. In the name of the bishops of the Council of Circa Augustine writes Letter 141 to the Donatists, insisting that the Catholics clearly defeated the Donatists at the Conference of Carthage. In Letter 142 Augustine congratulates several Donatist clerics for their return to the Catholic unity. Similarly, in Letter 144 he congratulates the citizens of Circa over their return to unity.

Besides the book-length Letter 140, two other letters point ahead to the Pelagian controversy. In Letter 101 Augustine writes to Bishop Memorius, whose son, Julian, was to become the bishop of Eclanum and Augustine's bitter enemy on the question of grace during the last decade of his life. In Letter 146 Augustine sends rather perfunctory words of greeting to Pelagius when he was passing through Africa, though the gutsy fellow had the nerve to produce a copy of it in his own defense at the Council of Diospolis in Palestine in 415.

When Rome fell, a number of Roman aristocrats took refuge in Africa. Among them were Albina, the widow of Publicola, her daughter, Melania the Younger, and Pinian, Melania's husband. This extremely wealthy family settled in Thagaste where their friend, Alypius, was bishop. Augustine writes Letter 124 to them, explaining that he could not travel to Thagaste to visit them. They, therefore, came to visit Augustine in Hippo, where the people of Hippo tried to have Pinian ordained as their priest. Augustine refused to ordain Pinian because he was unwilling. The people came close to rioting when Pinian tried to leave Hippo, and to calm the situation down, the rich young man publicly vowed to remain in Hippo, promising not to accept ordination anywhere but in Hippo. In Letter 125 Augustine writes to Alypius about allaying the suspicions of Albina that the people of Hippo were after their money. And in Letter 126 he writes to Albina, explaining why he refused to ordain Pinian, why Pinian's vow not to

leave Hippo was binding, and why she should not suspect that the people of Hippo were after their money.

In Letter 130 Augustine replies to Proba, another wealthy Roman widow who had taken refuge in Africa, explaining to her at length how she as a widow, though hardly a desolate one, ought to pray to God. He writes her again very briefly in Letter 131 and in Letter 150. In the latter he congratulates Proba and Juliana, her niece, both of whom were by that time living as widows, on the consecration of Demetrias, the daughter of Juliana, as a virgin.

Augustine writes Letter 132 to Volusian, the brother of Albina, who was still a pagan, exhorting him to read the scriptures and to send him any questions he had about the faith. Volusian replies in Letter 135 and Marcellinus adds further questions in Letter 136. Augustine replies in Letters 137 and 138 to Volusian and Marcellinus respectively.

A cluster of letters, which are dated anywhere between 409 and 423, deal with Faventius, who took sanctuary in the church of Hippo because of his financial problems, but was arrested when he became careless and ventured out. Augustine writes Letter 113 to Cresconius, the tribune of the Hippo waterfront, interceding on behalf of Faventius. So too, he writes Letter 114 to Florentinus, an imperial official, asking that the laws be implemented that would allow Faventius time to arrange his affairs. In Letter 115 he pleads with Fortunatus, the bishop of Cirta, to help Faventius, and in Letter 116 he commends the case of Faventius to Generosus, the governor of Numidia.

Several more or less isolated letters remain. In Letter 111 Augustine exhorts Victorinus, a priest, to face courageously the woes inflicted by the barbarian invasions. In Letter 112 Augustine writes to Donatus, the former proconsul, and urges him to follow Christ and to bring those under him into the Catholic communion. In Letter 122 Augustine writes to the people of Hippo to excuse his absence on ecclesiastical business. In Letter 127 he writes to Armentarius and Paulina who had vowed to live in a continent marriage, urging Armentarius to live out his vow. In Letter 143 Augustine writes to his friend, Marcellinus, with an explanation of some things he had said in his book, *Free Will*, and of various scriptural passages about which Marcellinus had asked. In Letter 145 Augustine writes to Anastasius, an African monk, on the dangers of worldly enticements and on the need of grace to live righteously. Finally, Augustine writes Letter 151 to Caecilian, the new imperial commissioner who took the place of Marcellinus after the latter's execution by the connivance of Marinus, who was to all appearances a close friend to Caecilian. The letter is a masterpiece of ambiguity and/or political maneuvering that leaves the role of Caecilian in the execution of Marcellinus and his brother at least highly dubious.

## Letter 100

Toward the end of 408 Augustine wrote to Donatus, the proconsul of Africa and a Catholic layman with possessions in Hippo and Siniti, about the treatment of the Donatist heretics. Augustine expresses his thankfulness for having a son of the Church in the office of proconsul and his fear that Donatus might implement the imperial orders in such a way that the heretics are put to death rather than corrected (paragraph 1). Augustine begs the proconsul not to impose the death penalty; otherwise, Augustine would be reluctant to denounce any heretics, and they might as a result do even more harm (paragraph 2).

*To his excellent lord and rightly honorable and outstandingly praiseworthy son, Donatus, Augustine sends greetings in the Lord.*

1. I would prefer, of course, that the African Church did not find itself in the midst of these afflictions so that it needed the help of any earthly power. But because, as the apostle said, *there is no power except from above* (Rom 13:1), our help is undoubtedly in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth,<sup>1</sup> when the Church is helped by you, the most sincere sons of our Catholic mother. For in the midst of such great evils who would not feel that God sent us no small consolation when you, so good a man and one most devoted to the name of Christ, were raised to the office of proconsul in order that authority united with your good will might hold back the enemies of the Church from their criminal and sacrilegious attacks, my excellent lord and rightly honorable and outstandingly praiseworthy son? Finally, there is only one thing that we fear in your justice, namely, that, since whatever impious and hostile people commit against the society of Christians is certainly more serious and vicious than if they committed such acts against others, you may judge that they should also be restrained in accord with the immensity of their crimes and not rather in accord with a consideration of Christian gentleness. We beg you by Jesus Christ that you do not do that. For we do not seek vengeance upon our enemies on this earth, nor ought the evils we suffer force us to such anguish of heart that we forget what he commanded us, for whose truth and name we suffer. We love our enemies and pray for them. Hence, we desire that, by making use of judges and laws that cause fear, they be corrected, not killed, so that they do not fall into the punishments of eternal condemnation. We do not want discipline to be neglected in their regard or the punishment they deserve to be applied. Repress their sins, therefore, in such a way that those who repent having sinned may still exist.

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1. See Ps 121:3.

2. We beg you, therefore, that, when you hear cases regarding the Church, even if you discover that some have gone after or afflicted her with most wicked injuries, you forget that you have the power to take a life and not forget our petition. It is not, my honorable and most beloved son, something unworthy or contemptible when we ask you that they, whom we ask the Lord to correct, not be put to death. Aside from the fact that we ought not to pull back from our constant aim of overcoming evil by good,<sup>2</sup> let Your Wisdom also bear in mind that no one except men of the Church ought to bring before you cases involving the Church. Hence, if you think that human beings should be put to death for these crimes, you will make us afraid that something of the sort might come to your court by means of our effort. And once this has been discovered, those people will roam about seeking our destruction with greater audacity since we will be compelled to choose even to be killed by them rather than to denounce them to your courts to be put to death. I beg you, do not receive this admonition, petition, and entreaty of mine with contempt. For I believe that you realize that, even if you were raised to a higher position than you have been and I were not a bishop, I could have had great confidence in you. Meanwhile, let the Donatist heretics know right away by an edict of Your Excellency that the laws issued against their error remain in effect, laws that they think and boast now have no force so that they need not, even in that way, spare us at all. But you will help our labors and perils very much to bear fruit if by the imperial laws you do not repress their sect, which is utterly vain and full of impious pride, in such a way that they think that they themselves or their members endure any sufferings for the truth and for justice. But when we request this from you, allow them to be refuted and instructed by the clearest proofs of solid facts found in the official records of Your Excellency or of lesser judges in order that even those who are detained by your order may bend their hardened will to what is better, if possible, and may read those documents to others for their salvation. For, to force human beings without teaching them, even though one does this in order that they may give up a great evil and embrace a great good, is a task more burdensome than beneficial.

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2. See Rom 12:21.

## Letter 101

At the end of 408 or in 409, Augustine wrote to Memorius, a bishop in Apulia and father of Julian, the future bishop of Eclanum, who was to become the principal opponent of Augustine after 418 in the Pelagian controversy. Augustine explains that he cannot send to Memorius the six books of his work, *Music*, because they have not been corrected (paragraph 1). He explains that the so-called liberal disciplines cannot be truly liberating in the way the Son of God brings true liberty (paragraph 2). Augustine explains the intention he had in mind in writing the six books called *Music* and points out that the first five books are difficult to understand without assistance (paragraph 3). Augustine, nonetheless, is sending the sixth book and expresses his affection for Memorius and for his son, Julian, whom he hopes to see, and he adds that he has not studied the meter of the Psalms (paragraph 4).

*To his most blessed and venerable and most dear lord and sincerely beloved brother and fellow bishop, Memorius, Augustine sends greetings in the Lord.*

1. I ought not to have written any letters back to you, who are filled with holy charity, without those books that you demanded of me with the strongest right of holy love,<sup>1</sup> in order that, at least with this obedience, I might reply to your letters, with which you have chosen to burden rather than honor me. And yet, where I cave in because I am burdened, there I am also raised up because I am loved. For I am loved, raised up, and chosen not by just anyone but by that man and priest of the Lord whom I perceive to be so pleasing to God that, when you raise your good soul to the Lord, you also raise me because you have me in your soul. I ought, therefore, already to have sent the books that I promised that I would correct, and I did not send them because I have not corrected them, not because I did not want to but because I could not, occupied as I was by many serious concerns. It would, however, have been ungrateful and cold if this holy brother and our colleague, Possidius,<sup>2</sup> in whom you will discover our presence to no small degree, either did not come to know you, who have such love for us, or came to know you without a letter from us. For he was nourished through our ministry, not in that literature that those enslaved to various desires call liberal, but with the bread of the Lord, to the extent that we could provide it to him, given our limitations.

2. After all, what else should be said to those who, though they are wicked and impious, think that they are liberally educated, except what we read in the writings that are truly liberal? *If the Son has set you free, then you will truly be free*

---

1. Augustine refers to his six books on *Music* which were written at Thagaste in 388-389.

2. Possidius was bishop of Calama and author of a biography of Augustine.

(Jn 8:36). For he allows us to know what liberal content those disciplines have that are called liberal by those who have not been called to freedom. After all, they have consonant with freedom only what they have consonant with the truth. For this reason that Son himself says, *The truth will set you free* (Jn 8:32). Those countless and impious stories, therefore, with which the poems of pagan poets are filled, are in no way consonant with our freedom, nor are the proud and polished lies of the orators, nor, finally, are the wordy sophistries of those philosophers who either have not known God at all or, *though they knew God, did not glorify him as God or thank him. Rather they became vain in their thoughts, and their foolish heart was darkened. And though they said that they were wise, they became fools, and they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of an image of a corruptible man and of birds, animals, and reptiles* (Rom 1:21-23). And those who did not worship these images or worshiped them only to a certain point did, nonetheless, *worship and serve a creature rather than the creator* (Rom 1:25). Heaven by all means forbid that anyone should rightly call liberal arts the frivolities, the deceitful insanity, the windy nonsense, and the proud error of these unhappy men. For they did not know the grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord, by which alone we are set free from the body of this death,<sup>3</sup> and they did not perceive in those studies what is true. History, of course, whose writers profess that they are faithful to the truth, especially in their narratives, may perhaps have something worth knowing for persons who are free, when they tell the truth about human actions, whether they are good or bad. I utterly fail to see how, in coming to know these, those who are not helped by the Holy Spirit and are forced by the condition of human weakness to gather hearsay evidence are not mistaken on very many points, and yet there is in them some approximation to freedom, if they do not have the will to deceive and do not deceive others, unless they are deceived by human beings out of human weakness.

3. But in all the movements of things the power of number is more easily studied in human words, and that study strives by certain ascents to rise, as if by steps, to higher and inner realms of truth. On these roads wisdom reveals herself joyously and meets her lovers with all providence.<sup>4</sup> In the beginning of our leisure, when my mind was free from greater and more important cares,<sup>5</sup> I wanted to compose an introduction to such a pursuit with these writings that you have wanted to receive from us, when I wrote six books exclusively on rhythm, and I was, I admit, planning to write perhaps another six on melody, when I hoped that I would have leisure. But after the burden of cares about the Church was imposed on me, all those trifles fled from my hands so that I can now

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3. See Rom 7:24.

4. See Wis 6:17.

5. At Cassiciacum and later at Thagaste before his ordination to the priesthood.



scarcely find the manuscript. Yet I cannot disregard your desire, which is for me not a request but a command. And if I can in fact send you this work, I will not regret having obeyed you, but you will regret having demanded it of me with such insistence. Five books of it are, of course, very difficult to understand, if no one is present who can not only distinguish the persons engaged in the discussion but can also sound the lengths of the syllables by pronouncing them aloud. For only in that way can the different kinds of meter be expressed and impressed upon the sense of hearing, especially since in certain meters measured silent pauses are intermingled, which cannot be perceived at all unless the speaker makes them clear to the hearer.

4. I have, of course, not delayed in sending to Your Charity the sixth book, which I found already corrected and which contains the fruit of the rest. Perhaps it will not be utterly unsuitable for a man of your seriousness. For the previous five books seem hardly worth knowing and reading by our son and fellow deacon, Julian,<sup>6</sup> since he is now fighting with us in Christ's army. I do not dare to say that I love him more than you, because I would not say this truthfully, but I still venture to say that I desire his presence more than yours. It can seem strange that I should desire his presence more though I love him equally. But the greater hope of seeing him does this to me. For I think that, if he should come to visit us at your command or with your permission, he will do what is proper for a young man, especially since he is not yet tied down by more important concerns, and will more rapidly bring you yourself to me. I have not written anything on the meter found in the verses of David.<sup>7</sup> For the translator from the Hebrew language, which I do not know, was not able also to indicate the meter for fear that the demands of the meter would force him to depart from the truth in his translation more than the sense of the verses permitted. I believe those who know that language well that those verses have a definite meter. For that holy man loved religious music and kindles our love for such studies more than any other author. May all of you who abide in concord in the same house<sup>8</sup> abide for eternity in the protection of the Most High,<sup>9</sup> father, mother, brothers, sons, and all children of the one Father, without forgetting us.

---

6. Julian, the son of Memorius, was the future bishop of Eclanum, Augustine's great Pelagian adversary during the last dozen years of his life.

7. That is, King David, the psalmist.

8. See Ps 69:7.

9. Ps 91:1.

## Letter 102

Between 406 and 412 Augustine wrote a letter to Deogratias, a priest of Carthage, the same man, then a deacon, to whom he had in 399 dedicated his work, *The Instruction for Beginners*. Along with the letter Augustine sent a small work, *Six Questions in Answer to the Pagans*. Augustine comments in his *Revisions* that he did not think that the six questions stemmed from the great philosopher, Porphyry, but from someone else with that name. He says there:

“Meanwhile, these six questions were sent to me from Carthage; a certain friend whom I wanted to become a Christian proposed them. They were sent for me to answer against the pagans, especially since he said that some of them were posed by the philosopher Porphyry. But I do not think that he was that Sicilian Porphyry whose reputation is very widespread. I gathered the discussions of these questions into a single book and not a lengthy one; its title is: *Six Questions Explained in Answer to the Pagans*. The first of these, however, is on the resurrection; the second on the time of the Christian religion; the third on the difference in the sacrifices; the fourth on the words of scripture, *With the measure by which you measure, it will be measured out for you* (Mt 7:2). The fifth question is on the Son of God according to Solomon, and the sixth on the prophet Jonah. In the second of these questions I said, ‘The salvation of this religion, the sole true religion by which true salvation is truthfully promised, was never lacking to anyone who was worthy, and one to whom it was lacking was not worthy.’ I did not say this as if anyone was worthy because of his merits, but in the sense in which the apostle said, *Not on the basis of works, but on the basis of the one who calls it was said, ‘The older will serve the younger’* (Rom 9:12), and he stated that his calling pertains to the plan of God. Hence, he says, *Not in accord with our works, but in accord with his plan and grace* (2 Tm 1:9). Hence, he also says, *We know that all things work together for the good for those who love God, for those who have been called to be holy according to his plan* (Rom 8:28). Of this calling he says, *That he may make you worthy of his holy calling* (2 Thes 1:11). After a letter that was later added at the beginning, this book begins as follows: ‘It disturbs certain people, and they ask’ ” (*Revisions* II, 31).

Since Deogratias forwarded these six questions that had been posed by a prominent man whose salvation Augustine strongly desired, Augustine answers the questions and asks that Deogratias present them to the man who had posed them (paragraph 1). The first question concerns the final resurrection (paragraphs 2 to 7) where Augustine argues that our resurrection will be like Christ’s rather than like Lazarus’. He responds to objections about the difference between Christ’s birth and ours, about his eating after the resurrection, and about the presence of his wounds in his risen body.

The second question deals with the question posed by the pagans, namely, why did Christ come only after so many centuries, if he is the only source of salvation? (paragraph 8). Augustine begins his reply by asking whether the pagan rites contributed to salvation and, if so, what was done before their institution (paragraph 9). If the pagans answer that their gods always existed, though they were

worshiped in other ways at other times, then the Christians can answer similarly that God always existed and always willed to save righteous and pious persons who did his will (paragraph 10). Christ, the only Son of the Father, remains the same from the creation of the world up to the end of it, despite the various stages of salvation history (paragraph 11). One and the same true religion was earlier signified by other names and signs, then more hidden, now more openly (paragraph 12). The gods of Rome, after all, were worshiped in a different way before Numa Pompilius, and this objection can be raised against every religion and philosophy. Augustine claims that Christ chose to reveal himself to human beings whom he knew would believe in him, a position that the monks of Provence would later take up as their own (paragraphs 13 and 14). So too, Augustine claims that from the time of Adam the salvation brought by the true religion was never lacking to anyone who was worthy of it (paragraph 15).

The third question concerns the objection of Porphyry that Christians reject the rites of the temple sacrifices, though the same rites were begun earlier by them or by the God they worship (paragraph 16). Augustine points out that the sacrifices offered by Cain and Abel show how ancient a rite sacrifice is, which the scriptures teach should be offered only to God (paragraph 17). False gods would never have sought sacrifices for themselves if they did not realize that it was due only to the true God (paragraph 18). Saint Paul does not find fault with sacrifice, but with sacrifice offered to demons (paragraph 19). Sacrifice should be offered to no creature (paragraph 20). With the coming of Christ there was a change, not of God or of religion, but of the sacrifices and sacraments (paragraph 21).

The fourth question concerns the proper interpretation of Matthew 7:2, *With the measure you measure it will be measured out to you* (paragraphs 22-27). The fifth question claims that Solomon said that God does not have a son, and Augustine replies very briefly with texts to the contrary from Proverbs (paragraphs 28-29). The sixth and final question concerns the credibility of Jonah's being in the belly of the whale for three days. Augustine replies with arguments for the possibility of miracles of various kinds and points out how Jonah prefigured Christ in a variety of ways (paragraphs 30-37). Finally, Augustine urges the man who posed the questions to him to become a Christian now rather than wait until he has come to an end of questions about the scriptures (paragraph 38).

*To his most sincere brother and fellow priest, Deogratias, Augustine sends greetings in the Lord.*

1. You preferred to pass on to me the questions proposed to you, not, I think, out of laziness, but because you are more willing to hear from us even those things that you know, because you are too fond of us. But I preferred those questions to be explained by you because that very friend who posed them, insofar as I can guess from the fact that he has not replied to any of my letters, seems ashamed to follow our views. The reason why is his concern. This is, nonetheless, my suspicion, nor is my suspicion either spiteful or absurd, since you know very well how much I love him and what a sorrow it is for me that he is not yet a Christian. And I, of course, not unreasonably suppose that he who I see does not

want to reply to me does not want to receive letters from me. Hence, I beg you that, as I obeyed you and was amid all my most pressing occupations afraid of offending your holy will, which is most dear to me, if I did not do what you asked, so you will do what I ask. This, however, is that you do not delay to answer him briefly on all those points in the way he asked you, as you indicated to me. You could have done this even before. For you will know when you read it that I said almost nothing that you yourself did not know or that you could not have known without my saying anything. I ask that you keep this work of mine with the others for study by those for whom you know it is suited. But let this man for whom it is most suited have that work of yours, which I am asking from you, along with the others who find delight in these questions, as they can be expressed by you, and among these I include myself. May you always live in Christ and keep us in mind.

### Six Questions Explained in Answer to the Pagans

#### *The First Question — The Resurrection*

2. It bothers certain people, and they ask which of the two resurrections corresponds to the resurrection that has been promised, whether that of Christ or that of Lazarus.<sup>1</sup> "If it is the resurrection of Christ," they ask, "how can this resurrection of Christ who was born without a human father correspond to the resurrection of those who were born with a human father? But if the resurrection of Lazarus is said to correspond to that promised us, this resurrection does not seem to fit either, since the resurrection of Lazarus was brought about from a body that was not yet decaying, from that body that bore the name Lazarus, while our resurrection will come about after many ages and from unidentifiable matter. Second, if the state after the resurrection is going to be a happy one with no injury to the body and no necessity from hunger, why is it that Christ ate and revealed his wounds? But if he did this on account of unbelief, it was a pretense; if, however, he revealed what was true, then wounds we have received will be present in the resurrection."

3. The answer to these people is that it is not the resurrection of Lazarus, but rather that of Christ that corresponds to the resurrection promised us, because Lazarus rose so that he would die again. But as scripture says of him, *Christ, rising from the dead, dies no more, and death will no longer have dominion over him* (Rom 6:9). This is also promised to those who will rise at the end of the world and who will reign with him for eternity. But the difference between the birth of Christ and ours, namely, that he was born without male seed, while we

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1. See Jn 11:43.

were born from a man and a woman, does not pertain to the resurrection, just as it does not pertain to the difference of his death. For his death did not fail to be a true death on account of his being born without male seed. In the same way the flesh of the first man, which came to be in a different way from ours, since he was created from the earth without parents, while we are created from parents, did not make any difference to his death so that he died in a different way than we do. As his different birth makes no difference to his death, so it makes none to his resurrection.

4. But in case non-believers should likewise not want to believe what is written about the first man, let them investigate or take note, if they can do at least this, how many kinds of animals are generated from the earth without parents, though they themselves have intercourse and bear offspring like themselves, and despite the difference in the manner of birth there is no difference of nature between those that were generated from the earth and those that came to be by sexual union. For they live in the same way, and they die in the same way, though they came to be in a different way. Thus it is not absurd that bodies that came to be in different ways should rise in the same way. Such human beings, however, unable to see when a different condition leads to different results and when it does not, if they notice some difference in the original conditions, claim that everything that follows ought to have the same difference. Such people can suppose that oil from animal fat ought not to float on top of water like that which comes from olives, because the origin of the two is far different, since the one comes from a tree and the other from meat.

5. With respect to that difference, namely, that the body of Christ rose on the third day without having decomposed by decay and corruption, while our bodies will be restored after a long time from some confused state into which they were broken down and disappeared, both of these are impossible for human powers, but both are very easy for divine power. For, just as the ray of our eye does not arrive more quickly at nearer objects and more slowly at more distant ones, but covers both spaces with equal swiftness, so when *in a blink of the eye* (1 Cor 15:52), as the apostle says, the resurrection of the dead takes place, it is as easy for the omnipotence and ineffable will of God to raise up bodies recently buried as ones that have decomposed over a long time. These things are unbelievable for certain people because they have not experienced them, though all of nature is so full of miracles that they cease to be wonderful, not because of the ease with which they are investigated, but because of our habit of seeing them, and for this reason they do not seem worthy of either consideration or inquiry. For I and whoever with me tries to understand *the invisible things of God through those which have been made* (Rom 1:20) admire either no less or more the fact that in a single and so small grain of seed there was hidden, as already having been begun, all those things that we praise in a tree than the fact that the great bosom of

this world, which receives human bodies when they decompose, will restore them whole and entire at the resurrection to come.

6. But how is it a contradiction that Christ ate after the resurrection and that in the resurrection promised us there will be no need of food, since we read that angels took food of the same sort and in the same way, not in a fictitious and unreal image, but in the most evident truth, and not out of necessity, but because of their power?<sup>2</sup> For the thirsty earth absorbs water in one way, and the bright ray of the sun does so in another; the former out of need, the latter by power. The body of the resurrection to come, then, will have an imperfect happiness if it could not take food and an imperfect happiness if it needed food. I could at this point argue more at length about the changes of bodily qualities and the powerful influence of higher bodies upon lower ones, but it was suggested that I reply briefly, and this is being written for the sort of minds for which a reminder is sufficient.

7. Let the man who posed these questions realize that after his resurrection Christ showed his scars, not his wounds, to those who doubted, and on account of them he also chose to take food and drink, not once, but quite often, so that they would not think that it was not a body, but a spirit, and that he appeared to them not as something solid, but as imaginary. Those scars would be fakes if no wounds had preceded them, and yet even those scars would not have existed if he had willed that they not exist. But for the sake of certitude about the plan of salvation he chose to show to those whom he was building up in a faith that was not feigned that one body did not rise in place of another, but that the very same body rose that they had seen crucified. What does it mean, then, when they say, "If he did this on account of unbelief, it was a pretense"? Suppose that any brave soldier in fighting for his country received many wounds and said to a highly skilled doctor who could heal them so that no scars would be visible that he wanted to be healed so that there would rather be traces of his wounds in his body, like claims to glory. Would that doctor be said to have made fake scars because he could have by his skill made them not to exist, but for a certain reason instead made them to exist by his skill? Those scars, as I said above, would be shown to be a pretense in only one way: if no wounds were healed.

### *The Second Question — On the Time of the Christian Religion*

8. They also posed other objections, which they said were taken from Porphyry's *Against the Christians*,<sup>3</sup> as if they were more powerful. They say, "If Christ says that he is the way of salvation, grace, and truth, he locates in himself

2. See Gn 18:8

3. Porphyry, the great Neoplatonist and student of Plotinus, wrote a work of fifteen books in opposition to the Christians. The work is no longer extant.

alone the return of souls who believe in him. What did people do for so many ages before Christ? To leave aside," Porphyry says, "the times before the kingdom of Latium,<sup>4</sup> let us take the beginning of humanity from Latium itself. In Latium itself before the founding of Alba<sup>5</sup> the gods were worshiped. In Alba the religions and rituals of the temples were equally influential. For many centuries Rome itself was without the Christian law for a long stretch of time. What," he asks, "was done concerning countless such souls who were without any sin at all, since the one in whom they could have believed had not yet offered his coming to human beings? The world along with Rome was fervent in the rites of the temples. Why," he asks, "did he who is called the savior absent himself for so many centuries? But," he adds, "lest they say that the human race was cared for by the old Jewish law, the law of the Jews appeared and flourished only after a long time and in a small region of Syria, though it later crept even into the boundaries of Italy, but only after Gaius Caesar or at the earliest during his reign. Up to the time of the Caesars, then, what happened to Roman or Latin souls which were deprived of the grace of Christ's coming?"

9. The answer to this question is that they should first say whether the worship of their gods, which was clearly begun at certain times, benefited those men. If they say that this worship did not benefit them in some way for the salvation of their souls, they destroy them along with us and admit that they are worthless. We, of course, also show that this worship is harmful, but it is no small step for the time being that they first admit that it is useless. If, however, they defend it and claim that it was both wisely and usefully instituted, I ask what happened to those who met death before this worship was begun, for they were, of course, deprived of this salvation and benefit. But if they could be purified in another way, why has the same mode of purification not continued on for their descendants? What need was there to institute new ceremonies, which did not exist in antiquity?

10. If at this point they say that the gods themselves certainly always existed and were always and everywhere capable of setting free their worshipers, but that they wanted people to serve them in accord with different times and places, here at one time and there at another, in this way in one place and time and in other ways in other places and times, why do they raise this objection against the Christian religion? For they themselves either cannot reply to it in defense of their own gods, or if they can, they should give themselves an answer in the same way in defense of our religion. Let them reply that it makes no difference that people worship with different ceremonies in accord with the different requirements of times and places, if what is worshiped is holy, just as it makes no difference that one speaks with different sounds in accord with the different

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4. The kingdom of Latium preceded in Italy the Roman people.

5. Alba was an old town in Latium, the mother city of Rome.

requirements of languages and hearers, if what is said is the truth. There is, of course, the difference that even human beings can by a certain social pact, as it were, institute sounds for a language by which they may share with one another their ideas, but those whose thinking was correct followed the will of God with regard to the rites by which they should worship the divinity. And the divinity was certainly never lacking to the righteousness and piety of human beings for their salvation, and if different rites are celebrated in different peoples bound together by one and the same religion, it is most important how they bring it about that human weakness is exhorted or tolerated and that the divine authority is not opposed.

11. Hence, we say that Christ is the Word of God through whom all things were made<sup>6</sup> and that he is the Son because he is the Word and not a word that is spoken and past, but an immutable word remaining immutably with the immutable Father, under whose rule all creation, both spiritual and bodily, is governed in accord with the demands of times and places. In him there is the wisdom and knowledge for directing and governing all creation with respect to what should be done about it and when and where. Certainly, even before he brought forth the people of the Hebrews, through whom he foreshadowed the revelation of his coming by suitable sacraments, and during the time of the kingdom of Israel and later when he revealed himself to mortals as mortal in the flesh that he took from the Virgin, and thereafter up to now when he is fulfilling all those things that he had before foretold through the prophets and from now on up to the end of the world when he will separate the saints from the wicked and repay each according to his works, the same Word is the Son of God, coeternal with the Father, and immutable Wisdom, through which all of nature was created and by participation in which every rational soul becomes blessed.

12. Therefore, all those from the beginning of the human race who believed in him and understood him somehow or other and lived pious and just lives according to these commandments, whenever and wherever they lived, were undoubtedly saved through him. For, just as we believe in him as both remaining with the Father and as having come in the flesh, so the people of old believed in him as remaining with the Father and as going to come in the flesh. The faith itself has not changed, nor is salvation itself different, because in accord with the different times there is now proclaimed as already having happened what was then foretold as coming. Nor do we need to think that the realities are different or that the means of salvation are different because one and the same reality is either predicted or proclaimed with different ceremonies and sacraments. Regarding which events should happen at what time from among those events pertaining to one and the same deliverance of the faithful and pious, let us leave the plan to God; let us hold onto obedience for ourselves. Hence, one and the

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6. See Jn 1:1-3.



same true religion was signified and observed by other names and signs then than now, earlier in a more hidden way, while later more openly, and earlier by fewer, but afterwards by many.

13. Nor do we raise the objection to them that Numa Pompilius<sup>7</sup> set up for the Romans gods to worship and that they were worshiped in a different way by the Romans or the Italians before.<sup>8</sup> Nor do we raise the objection that in the time of Pythagoras<sup>9</sup> that philosophy was famous which before either did not exist at all or existed in very few people who held the same ideas, but that it perhaps remained hidden because they did not live according to the same practices. But whether those gods are true or should be worshiped and whether that philosophy is of any benefit to human souls—that is what we are dealing with; that is what we are calling into question; that is what we are attacking with our argument. Let them, therefore, cease to raise as an objection against us what can be raised as an objection to every sect and every brand of religion. After all, since they admit that the times do not pass due to chance, but are arranged by divine providence, what is fitting and proper for any time surpasses human intelligence and is derived from the same source from which providence itself cares for things.

14. For, if they said that the teaching of Pythagoras did not exist always and everywhere because Pythagoras was a man and did not have it in his power, can they also say that, at that very time when he lived and in those places of the world where that philosophy flourished, all who were able to hear him also wanted to believe him and become his followers? And for this reason, if Pythagoras had such great power that he proclaimed his teachings where he wanted and when he wanted and if he had the highest foreknowledge of events along with that power, he would have appeared at no time or place except where and when he foreknew that people would believe him. Hence, they should not object to Christ that everyone does not follow his teaching. For they also realize that this objection can by no means be justifiably raised against either the wisdom of the philosophers or even the divinity of their gods. Let us leave aside the depth of the wisdom and the knowledge of God<sup>10</sup> in which there perhaps lies hidden far more deeply another divine plan, and let us also leave without prejudice other reasons that the wise could search out. What reply, then, will they make to us, if in the discussion of this question we say merely this for the sake of brevity, namely, that Christ willed to reveal himself to human beings and willed that his teaching be preached among them when he knew and where he knew there would be people who were going to believe in him? For he foreknew that in the times and in the places in which his gospel was not preached they would all react to the

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7. Numa Pompilius was the second king of Rome.

8. See Livy, *History* I, 49.

9. Pythagoras of Samos flourished in the 6th century before Christ; he is perhaps most famous for his doctrine of the transmigration of souls.

10. See Rom 11:33.

preaching of the gospel just as many, but not all, reacted when he was physically present, that is, those who refused to believe in him even when he raised the dead. Even now, when the predictions of the prophets concerning him have been fulfilled with such great evidence, we see many such people still refuse to believe. They prefer to resist with human cleverness rather than to yield to the authority of God, which is so clear and evident, so lofty and loftily spread throughout the world. As long as the intellect of a human being is tiny and weak, it ought to yield to the divine truth.<sup>11</sup> Why, then, is it surprising that, if Christ knew that the world was full of such non-believers during the previous ages, he rightly did not want to reveal himself or to be preached to those whom he foreknew would not believe either his words or his miracles? After all, it is not beyond belief that at that time they were all the same sort of people as, much to our surprise, we see that so many of them are from his coming until the present time.

15. And, nonetheless, from the beginning of the human race, at times in a more hidden way, at times in a more evident way, as God saw that it was appropriate to the times, he did not cease to speak in prophecies, and there were not lacking those who believed in him, both from Adam up to Moses and in the people of Israel, which was by a particular mystery a prophetic people, as well as in other peoples before Christ came in the flesh. For some are already mentioned in the holy books of the Hebrews from the time of Abraham, people not his descendants according to the flesh, nor members of the people of Israel, nor those who joined the people of Israel from another society; they were, nonetheless, sharers in this mystery. Why, then, should we not believe that there were also others now and then at other times and in other peoples, even though we do not find them mentioned in the same authorities? In that way the salvation brought by this religion, the only true religion by which true salvation is also truly promised, was never lacking to anyone who was worthy of it, and anyone to whom it was lacking was unworthy of it. And from the beginning of the propagation of the human race up to the end, this salvation is preached to some for their reward, to others for their judgment. And for this reason, God foreknew that those to whom salvation was not preached at all were not going to believe, and yet those who are not going to believe, though salvation is proclaimed to them, are pointed out as an example to those others who are going to believe when salvation is proclaimed; these people are being prepared for the kingdom of heaven and the company of the holy angels.<sup>12</sup>

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11. I have followed the reading in Migne which has "*divinae debet cedere veritati*" rather than the other editions which have "*credere*" or the CSEL edition which omits "*debet*."

12. See *The Predestination of the Saints* 9, 17-10, 19, where Augustine confronts this teaching which had been adopted by the monks of Provence. There he rejects this teaching since it makes the beginning of faith dependent upon the human will rather than upon God's gratuitous gift. He claims that in the present work he did not have to deal with the question in its full scope.

*The Third Question — The Difference in the Sacrifices*

16. Now let us look at the question that follows. He says, "The Christians blame the rites of sacrifice, the victims, the incense, and the other things that the worship in our temples uses, though," he says, "the same worship was begun in earlier times by them or by the God whom they worship, when God is shown to have needed the first fruits."

17. We reply to this that we recognize that this question was taken from that passage in our scriptures where it is written that Cain offered a gift to God from the fruits of the earth, but Abel from the first of the sheep.<sup>13</sup> From this we should rather understand how ancient an act sacrifice is, which the true and sacred writings teach should be offered only to the one true God, not because God needs it, since we most clearly read in those same writings, *I said to the Lord, "You are my God because you do not need my goods"* (Ps 16:2), and also because in accepting, rejecting, or welcoming them he does this only for our benefit. For our worship of God benefits us, not God. When, therefore, he inspires and teaches how he should be worshiped, he does this not only without any need on his part but to our greatest benefit. All such sacrifices, however, are signs and likenesses of certain realities, and they ought to teach us to examine, to recognize, or to recall those realities of which they are the likenesses. For discussing this matter in a sufficient way one should not demand a short discourse of the sort with which I am now supposed to answer you, especially since we have already said much on this topic in our other works. And those who have commented on the words of God before us have abundantly spoken of the likenesses of the sacrifices of the Old Testament as foreshadowing and prefiguring what was to come.<sup>14</sup>

18. We should, of course, not pass over in this brief treatment the fact that the false gods, that is, the demons who are the sinful angels, would never have sought these things for themselves from their worshipers, whom they deceive, if they did not know that the temple, priesthood, sacrifice and everything pertaining to these are owed only to the one true God. But when these are offered to God according to his inspiration and teaching, it is true religion, but when they are offered to the demons according to their wicked pride, it is harmful superstition. Hence, those who know the Christian scriptures of each Testament do not blame in the sacrilegious rites of the pagans their constructing temples, instituting a priesthood, and offering sacrifices, but their offering these to idols and demons. And who has any doubt that idols lack all awareness? When, nonetheless, they are placed on their thrones in lofty honor in order that they may be seen by those who pray and sacrifice to them, though they are without sensation and

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13. See Gn 4:3-4.

14. See Col 2:7 and Heb 10:1.

without life, they affect weak minds by the very likeness of living members and senses, so that they seem to live and breathe especially when the crowd adds the reverence with which it renders to them such great worship.

19. The divine scripture offers a medicine for these morbid and pestilential feelings; it teaches a point well known, but still teaches it with the salutary remedy of an admonition when it says, *They have eyes and do not see; they have ears and do not hear* (Ps 115:5) and other things of this sort. For, to the extent that these words are more patent and true in the language of the people, they fill with a salutary sense of shame those who with fear offer divine worship to such images and who gaze upon them, reverencing and adoring them as if they were living beings. And they present their petitions, offer their victims, and pay their vows to them as if they were present. They are so deeply affected that they do not dare to suppose that they lack awareness. But in order that these people might not think that only our books want to express the idea that idols engender such a feeling in the human heart, scripture states most plainly, *All the gods of the nations are demons* (Ps 96:5). For this reason the apostolic teaching not only says what we read in John: *Brothers and sisters, beware of images* (1 Jn 5:21), but also says what is found in Paul: *What then do I say? That what is offered to idols is something or that an idol is something? But what the pagans offer they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to have any association with demons* (1 Cor 10:19-20). From this it can be understood well enough that it is not the offering of sacrifice that is blamed. For the holy men of old offered sacrifice. But what the true religion reprehends in the superstitious practices of the pagans is that sacrifice is offered to false gods and wicked demons. For, just as the truth urges human beings to become companions of the holy angels, so impiety draws them off to the fellowship of the demons, for whom eternal fire is prepared,<sup>15</sup> just as an eternal kingdom is prepared for the society of the saints.

20. Nor do the wicked excuse their sacrilegious sacrifices and images on the grounds that they eloquently interpret what each of them signifies. All that interpretation, of course, is referred to a creature, not to the creator, to whom alone is owed that service of religion that is called among the Greeks by the single name, *λατρεία*. And we do not say that the earth, the seas, the sky, the sun, the moon, the stars, and certain heavenly powers located far from us are demons, but since creation as a whole is in part bodily and in part non-bodily, which we also call spiritual, it is clear that what we do in a pious and religious manner proceeds from the will of the mind, which is a spiritual creature and is to be preferred to every bodily creature. It follows from this that sacrifice should not be offered to any bodily creature. There remains the spiritual creation, which is either pious or impious, that is, pious in righteous human beings and angels who serve God properly, but impious in wicked human beings and angels, whom we call

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15. See Mt 25:34.41.

demons. And for this reason we should not offer sacrifice to a spiritual creature, even a righteous one. For, the more it is pious and subject to God, the less it thinks itself worthy of such honor, which it knows is due only to God. Hence, how much more destructive it is to offer sacrifice to demons, that is, to the wicked spiritual creation, which dwells in this nearest and hazy sky, as if in its airy prison, and is destined for everlasting punishment! For this reason, even when human beings say that they offer sacrifice to the higher powers of heaven, which are not demons, and think that there is only the difference of a name since they call them gods, while we call them angels, there stand before them to make fun of them by many forms of deception only the demons who are delighted by and in some sense feed on human error. For the holy angels do not approve of sacrifice unless it is offered in accord with the teaching of true wisdom and of the true religion to the one true God whom they serve in a holy society. Hence, just as impious pride whether of human beings or of the demons either commands or desires that these divine honors be shown to them, so pious humility either of human beings or of the holy angels refused these when offered to them and indicated to whom they were due. In our sacred writings perfectly clear examples of this are found.

21. The sacrifices are distributed by the word of God in accord with the appropriateness of the times. Thus some were offered before the revelation of the New Testament, which was inaugurated by the true sacrifice of one priest, that is, by the shedding of Christ's blood, and now we who are called Christians after his name has been made known offer another sacrifice appropriate to this revelation, a sacrifice that is made known not only in the books of the gospel but also in those of the prophets. A change, of course, not of God, nor of religion itself, but of the sacrifices and sacraments could now seem to be proclaimed with impudence if it had not been previously foretold. For, if one and the same man offers to God one sacrifice in the morning and another in the evening in accord with the appropriateness of the time of day, he does not change his God nor his religion. And one who wishes someone well in one way in the morning and in another way in the evening does not change his good wishes. In the same way, in the whole span of the ages, though one sacrifice was offered by the saints of old and another is offered by those who are alive now, it is not out of human presumption, but by divine authority, that the sacred mysteries suited to the different times are celebrated, but neither God nor religion is changed.

*The Fourth Question — On the Words of Scripture: With the measure you use, it will be measured out to you*

22. Now let us look next at what sort of an objection he raised concerning the measure of sin and its punishment. He slandered the gospel as follows: "Christ threatened," he said, "those who do not believe in him with eternal punish-

ments,<sup>16</sup> and elsewhere he said, *With the measure you use, it will be measured out to you* (Mt 7:2). This is," he says, "quite ridiculous and contradictory. For, if he is going to inflict punishment in accord with a measure and if every measure is limited by an end in time, what do threats of endless punishment mean?"

23. It is difficult to believe that this question was posed by a philosopher of any sort. He, of course, says, "Every measure is limited by time," as if there were only measures of times, such as hours, days, and years, or as we say that a short syllable has a simple unit of duration in comparison with a long syllable. After all, I do not think that bushels, pecks, urns, and jugs are measures of time. How, then, is every measure limited by time? Do not they themselves say that this sun is everlasting? They, nonetheless, dare to investigate and report in geometrical measures how great it is in relation to the earth. Whether they can do so or not, it is clear that the sun has a measure of its circumference proper to itself. For, if they grasp its magnitude, they grasp its measure, and if they do not attain this, they, of course, do not grasp its measure. But it does not follow from the fact that human beings cannot know it that there is no measure of it. Something can, therefore, be everlasting and have a certain measure of its own sort. In accord with them, after all, I have spoken of the eternity of the sun in order that they might be refuted by their own view and might grant that there can be something everlasting with a measure. And thus they should not for this reason suppose that we should not believe what Christ threatened with regard to everlasting punishment, because Christ said, *With the measure you use, it will be measured out to you* (Mt 7:2).

24. For, if Christ had said, "The measure you give will be the measure you get," it would not even in that case be absolutely necessary to apply the meaning to every aspect. For we can correctly say, "What you plant, that you will pick," though no one plants an apple, but a tree, while he picks an apple rather than a tree. But we say this in accord with the kind of tree, because one does not plant a fig tree and pick nuts from it. In that way one can say, "What you do you will suffer," not in the sense that, if one commits rape, he will suffer rape, but because what he did by this sin against the law, the law will do to him. That is, because he removed from his life the law that forbids such things, the law itself will also remove him from the human life over which he rules. Likewise, if he had said, "As much as you measure out, you will receive that much in return." It would not even in that case follow that we should understand that the punishments are equal to the sins in every respect. After all, wheat and barley, for example, are not equal, and one can, of course, say, "As much as you measure out, you will receive that much in return," that is, as much barley as wheat. And if we were dealing with pain and it was said, "As much pain as you inflict will be inflicted upon you," it is possible that the pain be as great though it lasts longer, that is, it is greater in duration, but the equal in intensity. For, if we say of two lamps, "This

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16. See Jn 3:18 and Mt 25:46.

flame is as hot as that one," it will not for this reason be false that one of them perhaps goes out more quickly. If, therefore, things are equal in one respect, but not equal in another, it does not follow that, because they are not equal in every way, it is false that they are equal in the way in which they are equal.

25. But since Christ said, *With the measure you use, it will be measured out to you* (Mt 7:2) and since it is clear that the measure by which something is measured is distinct from the thing which is measured, it is possible that with the measure human beings use, for example, a bushel of wheat, thousands of bushels may be measured out to them with it, so that there is a great difference in the amount of grain, but no difference in the measure. I pass over the difference in the things themselves, because it is possible not only that, with the measure by which one measures out barley, wheat is measured out to him, but also that, with the measure by which he measures out grain, gold is measured out to him and that there may be one bushel of wheat and many more of gold. Thus though both the kind and the amount of the things themselves differ incomparably, it can still be said most correctly, "With the measure he used, it was measured out to him in that measure." The reason why Christ said this is clearly seen a little above; he says, *Do not judge in order that you may not be judged, for with the judgment you pronounce, you will be judged* (Mt 7:1-2). If they pronounce an unjust judgment, will they be judged with an unjust judgment? Heaven forbid! There is, of course, no injustice in God.<sup>17</sup> But it was said in this way, *With the judgment you pronounce, you will be judged*, as if it said, "With the same will with which you do good, you will be delivered," or, "With the same will with which you do evil, you will be punished." It is just as if someone who uses his eyes for shameful desires should be ordered to be blinded; he would rightly hear, "With the same eyes with which you sinned, you have earned your punishment." For a person uses the judgment of his mind, whether good or evil, either for doing good or for sinning. Hence, it is not unjust that he should be judged with the same judgment he pronounces, that is, that he should pay the penalty in the judgment of his mind when he suffers those evils that follow upon a mind that judges wrongly.

26. For there are other clear torments that are prepared for the future, and they are also drawn from the same source of bad will. But in the mind itself where the appetite of the will is the measure of all human actions, punishment immediately follows upon the sin and is generally greater because of the more serious blindness of a person who does not feel it. Hence, when he said, *With the judgment you pronounce you will be judged*, he went on to add, *And with the measure with which you measure, it will be measured out to you*. In his own will the good man measures out good actions, and in that same measure happiness will be measured out to him. Likewise, in his bad will a bad man measures out his bad works, and in that same measure unhappiness will be measured out to him. For it

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17. See Rom 9:14.

is in the will that anyone is good when he wills rightly, and it is in the will that anyone is bad when he wills wrongly. And for this reason it is in the will that he also becomes either happy or unhappy, that is, in the very disposition of his own will, which is the measure of all actions and merits. It is by the qualities of the will, not by the lengths of times, that we measure either good actions or sins. Otherwise, it would be considered a greater sin to cut down a tree than to kill a human being. For the tree is cut down over a lengthy span of time with many blows, while a human being is killed in a moment with one blow. In return for so great a sin committed in a short time, if a man is punished by perpetual exile, we would say that he was dealt with more gently than he had deserved, although the length of the punishment is in no way comparable to the brevity of the crime in length of time. Where, then, is the contradiction if the punishments will be equally long or even equally eternal, but some gentler or more severe than others? In that way punishments whose duration is equal would not have equal severity on account of the measure of the sins, a measure not in terms of the time of their duration, but in terms of the wills of the sinners.

27. The will itself is, of course, punished by a punishment either of the mind or of the body, so that the will that delighted in sins is caught up in punishments and so that one who judges without mercy is judged without mercy. And in this statement the measure is the same only to the extent that what he did not give will not be given to him, and so the judgment he receives will be eternal, though the judgment he pronounced could not be eternal. Eternal punishments, therefore, will be measured out with the same measure for wrongdoings, even though they are not eternal, so that, because the sinner wanted to have the eternal enjoyment of his sin, he finds the eternal severity of his punishment. But the brevity I am aiming at in my reply does not permit me to gather all or even most of the passages of the holy books on sins and the punishments of sins and to draw from them one statement without any ambiguity, if I could do that with my mental power, even if I should find suitable leisure. Now I think, nonetheless, that I have sufficiently shown that it is not contrary to the eternity of the punishments that they are meted out in the same measure in which the sins were committed.

#### *The Fifth Question — The Son of God according to Solomon*

28. After this question the person who posed them from Porphyry added: "You will, of course, be so kind as to instruct me," he said, "about this next point, namely, whether Solomon really said, 'God does not have a son.'"

29. I reply quickly: Not only did he not say this, but he even said that God has a son. For in one of his books wisdom is speaking and says, *Before all the hills he begot me* (Prv 8:25). And what is Christ but the wisdom of God?<sup>18</sup> So too, in a

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18. See 1 Cor 1:24.



certain passage of Proverbs, he says, *God taught me wisdom, and I learned the knowledge of the saints. Who has gone up to heaven and come down? Who has gathered the winds in his bosom? Who has turned water into his garment? Who has held the bounds of the earth? What is his name or what is the name of his son?* (Prv 30:3-4 LXX). Of these two questions that I quoted at the end, one refers to the Father, that is, *What is his name?* On his account it had said, *God taught me wisdom.* And the other obviously refers to the Son when it says, *Or what is the name of his son?* on account of the other things that are better understood regarding the Son, that is, *Who has gone up to heaven and come down?* Paul mentions this as follows: *He who has come down is the same one who has gone up above all the heavens* (Eph 4:10). *Who has gathered the winds into his bosom?* that, is the souls of believers in a hidden and secret place. To them it is said, *For you are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God* (Col 3:3). It was said, *Who has changed the water into his garment?* in order that it might be said, *As many of you as have been baptized have put on Christ* (Gal 3:27). He said, *Who has held the ends of the earth?* who said to his disciples, *You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all of Judea and Samaria and even to the ends of the earth* (Acts 1:8).

#### *The Sixth Question — The Prophet Jonah*

30. The last question raised concerns Jonah, and it does not seem to come from Porphyry, but from the mockery of the pagans. For it is stated as follows: “Finally, what ought we to think about Jonah, who is said to have been in the belly of the whale for three days? It is ἀπίθανον<sup>19</sup> and unbelievable that a man was swallowed with his clothing and was in the innards of a fish. Or, if this is a symbol, be so good as to explain it. Then, what does it mean that a gourd plant sprung up over Jonah after he had been spit out? What was the reason for it to spring up?” For I have found that this kind of question has been severely mocked with much laughter by the pagans.

31. The answer to this is that either we should believe in none of the divine miracles or there is no reason why we should not believe in this one. We would not, however, believe that Christ rose on the third day, if the Christian faith was afraid of the laughter of the pagans. But since our friend did not raise a question about whether we should believe either that Lazarus was raised up on the fourth day or that Christ rose on the third day, I am very surprised that he regarded what happened to Jonah as incredible, unless he perhaps thought that a dead man was more easily raised up from the tomb than a living man could have been preserved in a whale’s belly, which is so vast. For, to pass over the great size of the monsters of the sea, which scientists have reported, who could not guess how

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19. The Greek term means implausible.

many human beings could be contained in the vault of a belly enclosed by those ribs that were displayed in a public square in Carthage and were quite familiar to the people? Who could not imagine the large opening of that mouth, which was like the door to that cavern? Or was the clothing, as our friend put it, perhaps an impediment to Jonah's being swallowed unharmed, as if he had to squeeze himself through narrow passages, when he was in fact hurled through the air and thus received in the belly of the beast before he could be injured by its teeth? Scripture, nonetheless, does not say that he was cast into that cavern either clothed or unclothed so that we can understand that he entered there unclothed, if it was perhaps necessary that his clothing be removed from him, like a shell from an egg, in order that he might be swallowed more easily. People are worried about this prophet's clothing as if he were said to have crawled through a small window or to have entered the baths where, even if it were necessary to enter with clothes on, it would hardly be bothersome, but in no sense miraculous.

32. But these people really find it something incredible in the divine miracle that the heat of the belly, by which food is digested, could have been tempered so that it would preserve the man's life. How much more incredible, then, would they find it that those three men cast into the furnace by the wicked king walked about in the middle of the fire uninjured!<sup>20</sup> Hence, if they refuse to believe any divine miracles, they must be refuted by another line of argument. For they ought to object not to one of them as incredible and to call it into question, but to all of this sort or at least more marvelous ones that are recorded. And suppose, nonetheless, that Apuleius of Madaura<sup>21</sup> or Apollonius of Tyana<sup>22</sup> was said to have done what is recorded about Jonah. The pagans spread word of many of their miracles without any reliable source, even though demons do some things like what the angels do, not in reality, but in appearance, not through wisdom, but through deceit. If, nonetheless, some such action is reported concerning these men, whom they call by way of praise magicians or philosophers, then it is not sounds of laughter, but expressions of pride that sound forth on their lips. Let them laugh in that way at our scriptures; let them laugh as much as they can, while they see that day by day they themselves are becoming scarcer and fewer in number, either because they are dying off or because they are coming to believe. Let them laugh as all the things are fulfilled that the prophets foretold, who so long before laughed at these people who were going uselessly to fight against the truth, who were going to bark against it in vain, and who were gradually going to fade away. Those prophets left to us, their successors, the chance not only to read their prophecies but to see their fulfillment.

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20. See Dn 3:21,24.

21. Apuleius of Madaura, a Latin author, was born in Madaura circa 125 and died in Carthage circa 180. He taught a mixture of Platonic philosophy and magic.

22. Apollonius of Tyana was a famous magician, prophet, and wonder-worker. He was often compared to Christ.

33. Now, it is neither absurd nor improper to ask what these events mean so that, when their meaning has been explained, we may believe not merely that they really happened but that they were written down because they had a meaning. First of all, let a person not doubt that Jonah the prophet was in the huge belly of the whale for three days, if he wants to examine why this happened. For it did not happen without a purpose, but it did, nonetheless, happen. For, if those events that were merely spoken of in symbols without having happened stir one to faith, how much more ought those events to stir one to faith that were not merely spoken of in symbols but also took place! For, just as we humans customarily speak with words, so the divine power also speaks with actions. And just as new or less familiar words add a splendor to human discourse, when they are added to it with moderation and propriety, so the eloquence of God is somehow more resplendent in miraculous actions that have an appropriate meaning.

34. Why, then, are we asked what was symbolized by the fact that the whale gave back alive on the third day the prophet who had been swallowed, when Christ explains this? He says, *An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign shall be given to it save the sign of the prophet Jonah. For, as Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days and three nights, so will the Son of man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights* (Mt 12:39-40). But it would take a long time to explain how to account for the three days of the death of Christ the Lord, for we understand a whole day from a part on the first and the last day so that we count three whole days, that is, along with their nights. And this has already been very often treated in other works. Just as, then, Jonah went from the ship into the belly of the whale,<sup>23</sup> so Christ went from the tree into the tomb or into the depth of death. And just as Jonah did this for those who were endangered by the storm, so Christ did this for those who are tossed about in this world. And just as Jonah was first ordered to preach to the Ninevites, but the prophecy of Jonah did not reach them until after the whale spat him out,<sup>24</sup> so the words of the prophets were sent forth to the nations, but did not reach them until after the resurrection of Christ.

35. But when Jonah pitched a tent and sat opposite the city of Nineveh, waiting to see what would happen to it,<sup>25</sup> he offered us in his person another interpretation. For he symbolized the carnal people of Israel. After all, this people was saddened over the salvation of the Ninevites, that is, over the redemption and deliverance of the nations. For this reason Christ came to call, not the righteous, but sinners to repentance.<sup>26</sup> The shade, therefore, of the gourd plant over his head was the promises of the Old Testament, or even the very

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23. See Jon 1:11-12.15.

24. See Jon 1:2-3 and 3:2-3.

25. See Jon 4:5.

26. See Lk 5:32.

sacrifices in which were found, as the apostle says, *a shadow of what is to come* (Col 2:17), as if offering shelter from the heat of temporal evils in the land of promise. But the worm that came in the morning and made the gourd plant dry up because of its gnawing<sup>27</sup> strikes me as the same Christ once again, for when the gospel was preached from his lips, all those things that flourished for a time among the Israelites or had a meaning that foreshadowed what was to come faded away deprived of their meaning. And now that people, which has lost the kingdom of Jerusalem, their priesthood, and their sacrifice, all of which foreshadowed what was to come, is being burned with the great heat of tribulation in its dispersion in captivity, just as Jonah, as scripture says, also suffered gravely from the blazing sun,<sup>28</sup> and yet the salvation of the nations and of those who do penance is valued more highly than his pain and the shade that he loved.

36. Let the pagans continue to laugh, and with even prouder chatter let them mock Christ, the worm, and this interpretation of the prophetic mystery, until that worm gradually and little by little devours them. For Isaiah prophesied about all of these, and God spoke to us through him: *Hear me, you who know justice, my people, who have my law in your hearts: Do not fear the reproach of men or be overwhelmed by their slander. Do not consider it important that they scorn you. For, like a garment, they will be worn out by time, and they will be eaten as wool by a moth. But my righteousness remains for eternity* (Is 51:7-8). Let us, then, recognize the worm of the morning, because in that psalm whose title says, *For help in the morning*, he chose to call himself by that name. He says, *I am a worm and no man, reproached by men and rejected by the people* (Ps 22:7). This reproach is included among those reproaches that Isaiah the prophet commands us not to fear, when he says, *Do not fear the reproaches of men* (Is 51:7). They are eaten by this worm as if by a moth, for they are surprised at their own fewness as they fade away day by day under the tooth of his gospel. Let us recognize this worm, and let us suffer human reproach in return for divine salvation. He is a worm on account of the lowliness of the flesh, perhaps also on account of his birth from a virgin. For this creature is usually generated from flesh or any other earthly stuff without any sexual union. He is a worm of the morning because he rose at dawn. That little gourd plant could, of course, have dried up even without the little worm. Finally, if God considered the worm necessary for this purpose, what need was there to add, "of the morning," if not in order that we might recognize that worm who sings, *For help in the morning. I, however, am a worm and no man?*

37. What could be clearer than this prophecy now that its realization and fulfillment have come about? This worm was mocked when he hung upon the cross, as was written in the same psalm, *They have spoken with their lips and*

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27. See Jon 4:7.

28. See Jon 4:8.

wagged their head: “He hoped in God. Let him rescue him; let him save him because he loves him” (Ps 22:8-9); then there was fulfilled what he foretold, *They have pierced my hands and feet; they have numbered all my bones. They have looked upon me, and they have stared at me. They divided my garments for themselves, and they cast lots over my cloak* (Ps 22:17-19). The old book foretold the events to come with just as great a clarity as the new gospel reports them. But if this worm was mocked in this lowliness, as I began to say, is he still to be mocked when we see that those events are being fulfilled that this psalm speaks of next, *All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will worship in his sight, for the Lord’s is kingship, and he will rule over the nations* (Ps 22:28-29)? In that way the people of Nineveh came to their senses and turned to the Lord.<sup>29</sup> Israel was in sorrow over this salvation of the nations through their repentance that was prefigured so long ago in Jonah, as Israel is in sorrow now that she is stripped of the shadow and burned by the heat. Anyone, of course, may explain in any other way all the other things concerning Jonah the prophet that are hidden in mysteries, provided that it is in accord with the rule of faith. Clearly the fact that he was in the belly of the whale for three days may not be interpreted in another way than as the heavenly teacher himself, as we have recalled, revealed it in the gospel.

38. We have explained the questions set before us as best we could. But let the man who posed them now become a Christian. Otherwise, while he is waiting to come to an end of his questions about the holy books, he may come to the end of this life before he passes from death to life. It is, after all, possible that, before he has received the Christian sacraments, he has questions about the resurrection of the dead. He should also perhaps be allowed to ask about Christ why he came after so long a time or to ask other few, but important questions, to which the rest are subordinate. If he thinks that he is going to come to an end of all questions, such as that about the verse, *With what measure you measure, it will be measured out to you* (Mt 7:2), or this question about Jonah, before he becomes a Christian, he is not thinking enough about either the human condition or his own present age. For there are countless questions that we need not bring to an end before coming to the faith; otherwise, we may come to the end of life without faith. But clearly, once we already hold onto the faith, we should investigate those questions with great eagerness in order to bring the minds of the faithful to experience pious delight, and we should share without any arrogance or pride whatever light we find in them. But we must tolerate without any loss of salvation what remains hidden.

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29. See Jon 3:5.

## Letter 103

After the beginning of 409, Nectarius, a pagan official of Calama in Numidia, again wrote to Augustine. In Letter 91 Augustine had replied that it was not proper that the outrageous crime of the people of Calama go completely unpunished. As Augustine explains in that letter, the pagan citizens of Calama had celebrated a feast contrary to the imperial laws and during the celebration had stoned and burned the church as well as injured and even killed some Christians. In the present letter Nectarius once again pleads for his fellow citizens. He describes Augustine as a great philosopher like Cicero (paragraph 1). He insists that we should love not only our heavenly city, but also our earthly one (paragraph 2). He argues that to punish his people by depriving them of their property is a worse punishment than death and argues that all sins are equal according to the philosophers so that all sins should be pardoned if any are (paragraph 3). Finally, he asks Augustine to consider the sorrow and grief that physical punishment will bring to so many people (paragraph 4).

*To Augustine, his rightly and deservedly revered lord and brother, who is worthy of honor in every way, Nectarius sends greetings in the Lord.*

1. When I received the letter of Your Excellency by which you destroyed the worship of idols and the ceremonies of the temples,<sup>1</sup> I thought that I heard the voice of a philosopher, but not of that philosopher of whom they speak in the classroom of the Academy.<sup>2</sup> That sort of philosopher resides in dark corners on the ground, immersed in some deep thought, with his head between his knees, which have been pulled back to his forehead. As a slanderer, lacking any doctrine of his own, he attacks the famous discoveries of others and accuses their brilliant ideas, though he defends nothing of his own. But clearly awakened by your words, Marcus Tullius, the consul, stood before my eyes. Having saved the lives of countless citizens, he was crowned with laurel and carried the emblems of victory in the forum, while the schools of Greece stood in awe, and still breathless, he laid down that trumpet of his sonorous voice and tongue, which he made to resound against those guilty of crimes and against murderers of their fatherland in a spirit of righteous indignation.<sup>3</sup> And imitating the mantle of a philosopher, he tossed back the toga over his shoulders, having released its many folds.

2. And so, since you were urging us to the worship and religion of the most high God, I gladly listened; since you argued that we should look to the heavenly fatherland, I received this gratefully. For you do not seem to me to speak of that

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1. Nectarius refers to Letter 91.

2. The Academy was a grove near Athens where Plato taught; here it is used in a looser sense to refer to any pagan philosophy.

3. Nectarius refers to Cicero's role in quelling the conspiracy of Catiline.

city that some wall encircles and contains, nor of that city of the world that the treatises of the philosophers mention and call the city common to all, but of that city where the great God and souls who have merited well of him have their dwelling and abode, the city that all religions seek after by diverse ways and paths, the city that we cannot express in speech, though we may be able to find it by thought. Though this city is to be sought and loved above all, I do not think that the other city in which we were born and raised should be abandoned, the city that first allowed us to enjoy this daylight, nourished us, and educated us. And—to state what properly pertains to the issue—most learned men say that from that city there is prepared for those who merit it by doing good a dwelling in heaven after the death of the body.<sup>4</sup> And in that way these people who have merited well of the cities of their birth are raised up to the city above, and we are taught that these people who rescued their fatherland either by their counsels or by their works dwell closer to God. Those words that you chose to say as a joke, namely, that our city is ablaze not with wars but with flames and fires and produces thorns rather than flowers,<sup>5</sup> is not the most severe criticism, since we know that flowers often spring from thorns. For who has any doubt that roses spring from thorns and that grain is protected by sheaths of the ears so that pleasant things are often found mixed with the bitter?

3. Finally, it was stated in the letter of Your Excellency that neither the life nor the blood of anyone is demanded to avenge the Church, but that the guilty should be deprived of their possessions,<sup>6</sup> something they fear most of all. But unless I am mistaken in my view, I think that it is more intolerable to be deprived of one's possessions than to be killed. If, as you know is frequently said in literature, death takes away the experience of all evils but a life of neediness leads to eternal disaster, it is worse to live badly than to end life by a bad death. The nature of your work also shows this, for in it you support the poor, relieve the sick with cures, and apply medicine to afflicted bodies. You do this, finally, by every means in order that the afflicted may not feel their sufferings for a long time. With regard to the measure of sins, the kind of sin it is seen to be for which pardon is asked makes no difference. For, first of all, if repentance both brings pardon and cancels the sin, he is surely repentant who begs and who embraces the feet of the one offended. And, if, as some philosophers think,<sup>7</sup> all sins are equal, forgiveness ought to be common to all. Someone spoke rather rudely; he sinned. Another hurled insults and accusations; he sinned equally. Someone robs the property of another; this too is counted as a sin. Another violates profane or sacred places; he should not be deprived of forgiveness. Finally, there would be no room for pardon if sins had not come first.

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4. See Cicero, *The Dream of Scipio (Somnium Scipionis)* 3.

5. See Letter 91, 2.

6. See Letter 91, 9.

7. The Stoics taught that all sins are equal.

4. Now, since I have responded more or less, as it is said, not as much as I ought to have but as much as I could, I beg and pray—I wish that I could do so in person so that you could also see my tears—that you reflect again and again on who you are, what you profess, and what you are doing. Consider the spectacle of that city from which those who are to be brought to punishment are taken; consider the grief of mothers, of wives, of children, of parents; consider the shame with which they can return to their fatherland, released, but tortured. Consider the sorrows and groans that are renewed by the sight of their wounds and scars. After having thoroughly weighed all these, first of all, think of God; think of what people will say; think rather of the goodness of friends and the union of brothers, and win praise by granting pardon rather than by exacting vengeance. And let these things hold for those who are bound by the true guilt of what they confessed. By the consideration of the law of your religion, you have already pardoned them, something that I do not cease from praising. But I can hardly put in words how cruel it is to go after the innocent and to call up on a capital charge those who clearly had no part in the crime. If they happen to be acquitted, think, I beg you, of the hatred they will have for their accusers when they will be released, since their accusers spontaneously dismissed the guilty, but let the innocent go, only after they themselves lost their case in court. May the highest God keep you and preserve you as a guardian and ornament of his law.



## Letter 104

In the beginning of 409 or 410 Augustine replied to Nectarius' previous letter. Augustine notes that Nectarius' reply to his letter was slow in coming, but assures him that he is not aiming at bodily punishments of the guilty (paragraph 1). He complains that Nectarius attributes to him views that he does not hold (paragraph 2). He insists that a life of poverty is not the worst disaster (paragraph 3) and that Nectarius ought to fear a life of luxury for his people more than a life of need. In no case did Augustine say that the people of Calama should be reduced to such a poverty that they want what is necessary for survival (paragraph 4). Augustine urges Nectarius to reread his letter and quotes relevant parts from it in which Augustine had delimited the extent of punishment he would allow (paragraph 5). Christian mildness seeks lesser punishments than what was considered just in the time of the Roman Republic (paragraph 6). Augustine argues that the punishments he has in mind are really for the good of the people of Calama (paragraph 7).

Nectarius argued that the kind of sin for which one asks pardon makes no difference, and Augustine concedes that a Christian should not punish out of vengeance (paragraph 8). Nectarius argued that repentance cancels the sin, but Augustine claims that this is true only in the true religion (paragraph 9). Augustine tells Nectarius that, if he loved his people as Augustine does, he would want for them the same benefits that Augustine does (paragraph 10). Augustine commends to Nectarius a love of the eternal fatherland as preferable to the love of the earthly fatherland (paragraph 11).

Nectarius had said that all religions seek after the eternal fatherland in different ways, and Augustine grants that they do seek after it, but insists that only the true religion has the way to attain it (paragraph 12). In following, however, the way that holds all sins are equal, one would wander from the truth (paragraph 13), and Augustine points out the absurdity of the view that all sins are equal (paragraph 14). It is right to ask that Christians pardon sins, not because of the equality of all sins, but because of mercy (paragraph 15). Augustine tells Nectarius that he is correct in appealing to the mercy of Christians and reminds him that the Stoics regarded mercy as a failing (paragraph 16). Nectarius had asked that the innocent be spared. Augustine claims that he distinguished the more guilty from the less guilty and reminds Nectarius of the Stoic view that all sins are equal. Finally, he promises to act as a Christian (paragraph 17).

*To his excellent lord and rightly honorable and beloved brother, Nectarius, Augustine sends greetings in the Lord.*

1. I read the letter of Your Graciousness by which you replied to me long after I sent my letter to you. For I had written back, when my holy brother and

fellow bishop, Possidius,<sup>1</sup> was still with us and had not set sail. But on 27 March, almost eight months after I had written, I received this letter that you deigned to give him for me. Hence, I certainly do not know why your letter reached me or why my letter reached you so late. Or perhaps it has only pleased Your Wisdom to reply at this time, something that you scorned to do before. If that is the case, I wonder why it is. Have you heard something that we still do not know, for example, that my brother, Possidius, has obtained the authority over your citizens to punish them more severely? I would say, without wanting to offend you, that he loves them in a much more salutary way than you do. For your letter shows that you fear such punishment when you admonish me to set before my eyes “the spectacle of that city from which those who are to be brought to punishment are taken; consider the grief of mothers, of wives, of children, of parents; consider the shame with which they can return to their fatherland, released, but having been tortured; consider the sorrows and groans that are renewed by the sight of their wounds and scars.”<sup>2</sup> God forbid that we should insist that these things be inflicted upon any of our enemies either by us or by anyone. But, as I said, if rumor has brought something of the sort to you, state it more openly in order that we might know either what we ought to do so that these things do not occur or what we ought to reply to people who believe this.

2. Rather consider my letter to which you were slow to reply. For in it I expressed well enough our attitude, but, I suspect, having forgotten what I had written to you, you have written back with other ideas far different and utterly unlike mine. In fact, as if you recalled what I put in my letter, you inserted in yours what I had not at all put in mine. You say that it was stated at the end of my letter that “neither the life nor the blood of anyone is demanded to avenge the Church, but that the guilty should be deprived of their possessions, something they fear most of all.”<sup>3</sup> And then, showing how great an evil this is, you go on to add that, unless you are mistaken in your view, it is thought to be “more intolerable to be deprived of one’s possessions than to be killed.”<sup>4</sup> And in order to explain more clearly the possessions of which you were speaking, you go on to add that I know that it is frequently said in literature that “death takes away the experience of all evils, but a life of neediness leads to eternal disaster.”<sup>5</sup> Then you drew that conclusion that it is worse to live amid evils than to end life with a bad death.

3. I, in fact, do not recall having read anywhere in our books, to which I admit that I applied my mind later than I would have wanted, nor in your books, which I

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1. Possidius was the Catholic bishop of Calama in Numidia and Augustine’s close friend and first biographer.

2. Letter 103, 4.

3. Letter 103, 3.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*

studied from early youth, that a life of neediness leads to eternal disaster. For poverty along with hard work is never a sin and rather limits and inhibits sins. And for this reason we need not fear that having lived here in poverty spells an eternal disaster for anyone after this short life, and in this life itself, which we live on earth, no disaster could be eternal, since that same life cannot be eternal, since it cannot even be long, no matter to what point of old age we come. For I have rather read in those books that this life we enjoy is short, during which you think—and you remind us that it is often said—that there can be an eternal disaster. But that death is the end of all evils is found in your books, but not in all of them. This is, of course, the view of the Epicureans and any others who think that the soul is mortal. But those whom Tully called philosophers of consular rank,<sup>6</sup> because he highly valued their authority, think that the soul is not extinguished, but goes elsewhere when we come to the last day of our life and continues to exist either in happiness or in misery, as its good or evil merits demand. This corresponds to the sacred books of which I desire to be a teacher. For death is the end of evils, but only for those whose life is chaste, pious, faithful, and innocent, not for those who burn with desire for temporal trifles and illusions and think themselves to be happy here. For they are proven to be wretched by the very wickedness of their will, and after death they are forced not only to have greater misery, but also to feel it.

4. Since these ideas are often stated in certain of your books that you consider more respectable and in all of ours, O good lover of even your earthly fatherland, fear a life of luxury for your citizens, not a life of neediness. And if you fear a life of neediness, warn them that they must rather avoid that neediness that, though it is surrounded by a great prosperity of temporal goods, is, to use the words of your authors, “lessened neither by abundance nor by scarcity,”<sup>7</sup> because they long for them insatiably. In that letter of mine, nonetheless, to which you replied, I did not say that the enemies of the Church, your citizens, ought to be corrected by that degree of want at which they lack what is necessary for nature and to which mercy comes to the aid. You thought that you should even dictate to us that this is indicated by the nature of our work in which we support the poor, relieve the ill by cures, and apply medicine to afflicted bodies,<sup>8</sup> though being in need in such a way is better for a person than abounding in all things in order to satisfy one’s evil inclinations. But heaven forbid that I judged that those with whom we are dealing should be reduced to this state of misery by that punishment.

2. 5. Reconsider my letter, if you judged it at all worthy, if not to be reread when you were going to reply to it, at least to be set aside so that it could be

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6. See Cicero, *Philosophical Fragments* V, 102; see also *Answer to Julian* IV, 15, 76.

7. Sallust, *The War against Catiline* (*Bellum Catilinae*), ch. 11.

8. See Letter 103, 3.

brought out at your bidding when you want, and notice what I said. You will, of course, find that point, I think, to which you should admit you did not respond. For I now include my words from that letter, "We do not desire to feed our anger by avenging past actions, but we act with mercy in looking out for the future. Bad persons have ways in which they may be punished by Christians, not only gently, but also to their benefit and salvation. For they have their life and bodily integrity; they have the means to live; they have the means to live badly. Let the first two remain untouched so that those who repent may live. This is what we desire; this is what we seek with all the energy we have. With regard to the third, the Lord will punish very mercifully if he wills that it be cut back as something decayed and harmful."<sup>9</sup> If you had considered my words when you were so good as to reply to me, you would have thought it more insulting than courteous to petition us about avoiding not only the death, but also the bodily torture of those for whom you intercede. I said of them that we want their life and bodily integrity to remain untouched. Nor would you, of course, have feared from us such a life of neediness that they needed food begged from others. I said that we want that second element of theirs to be preserved, namely, that they have that by which they may live. But that third factor that they have is that by which they live badly; that is, to mention nothing else, there is certainly that by which they fashioned silver images of false gods, and for preserving or adoring or worshiping them with a sacrilegious rite they went so far as to burn the church of God, and the sustenance of poor religious was offered to the unhappy crowd to plunder, and blood was shed. You, who are concerned for your city, why do you fear that such freedom be cut back so that such audacity may not be nourished and strengthened in every way by such perilous impunity? Explain this to us; teach us by careful argumentation what evil is present here. Pay careful attention to what we say so that you do not somehow seem by an indirect accusation, as if in a form of petition, to raise as an objection what we say to you.

6. Let your citizens be honest people with good morals, not with superfluous goods. We do not want them to be reduced by us through that punishment to the plow of Quintus or the hearth of Fabricius.<sup>10</sup> Those leaders of the Roman republic not only did not lose honor in the eyes of their citizens because of that poverty but were especially beloved and better suited for managing the wealth of the fatherland because of it. We do not desire or aim even for this, namely, that the rich people of your fatherland should be left with the lifestyle of ten pounds of silver lived by the famous Rufinus who was twice consul, an amount that the severe censure of that time laudably judged should be further cut back as excessive. The custom of a degenerate age persuades us to treat more gently exces-

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9. Letter 91, 9.

10. L. Quintus Cincinnatus was renowned for his austerity and C. Fabricius for his incorruptibility and frugality.

sively weakened souls to the point that Christian mildness considers excessive what those judges considered just, and you see what a difference it makes whether the possession of such a sum is itself a punishable offense or whether allowing someone to have such a sum on account of other most serious sins is such a sin. What was then a sin we now want to be at least the punishment of sin. But there is a middle course that is possible and that ought to be followed, namely, that severity should not go to this extreme and that impunity should not rejoice and celebrate in excessive security and set for other unfortunate people an example to imitate that would lead to most grave and most hidden punishments. At least grant that they who undertake to burn and ravage our necessary goods may fear for their quite superfluous goods. Allow us to give this benefit to our enemies that, while they fear for possessions that it is not harmful to lose, they may try not to commit what is harmful to themselves. Nor should this, after all, be called the punishment of a sin, but the safeguard of foresight; this is not to impose punishment on them, but to protect them from receiving punishment.

7. If anyone keeps an imprudent person by some experience of pain from becoming used to pointless crimes and from paying the most atrocious penalties, he is like someone who pulls the hair of a boy so that he does not tease snakes, and so, though such love is bothersome, no member is injured, but health and life are endangered by that from which he is deterred. We are not being kind when we do what we are asked to do, but when we do what does not harm those who ask us. For we benefit people by not giving them many things, and we would have harmed them if we had given them. This is the reason for the proverb: "Don't give a boy a sword." Tully says, "Don't give one even to your only son."<sup>11</sup> For the more we love anyone, the less we ought to hand him the means by which he sins with great danger. Hence, those things which are dangerously entrusted to those who use them wrongly are also generally taken away from them in a way that contributes to their safety. For, when physicians see that gangrene must be cut or burned away, they often out of mercy turn a deaf ear to many tears. If as little children or as adolescents we had received pardon from our parents or teachers as often as we asked for it when we did wrong, who of us would have grown up to be a tolerable person? Who would have learned anything useful? These things are done with foresight, not with cruelty. In the present case, please, do not aim only at how you may obtain what your people ask you to obtain. Rather, consider everything carefully. If you leave out of consideration past actions, which cannot now become undone, look a little to the future; pay attention wisely, not to what those people who petition you desire, but what is to their benefit. For we are surely not proven to love them loyally if we only look at what they desire for fear that, by not doing what they ask, we will

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11. See Cicero, *In Defense of Sextus (Pro Sexto)* 24. See Diogenes, *The Lives of the Philosophers (Vitae philosophorum* IV, 46: μή παιδί μάχαριαν.

be loved by them less. And what happens to the fact that your literature praises that ruler of the fatherland who had at heart the benefit of the people rather than their desire?<sup>12</sup>

3, 8. "The kind of sin it is seen to be for which pardon is asked," you say, "makes no difference."<sup>13</sup> You would have been correct in saying this if it were a question of punishing, not correcting human beings. After all, God forbid the heart of a Christian from being moved to punish anyone out of a desire for revenge. God forbid that, in forgiving the sin of anyone, a Christian either does not anticipate the petition of the suppliant or does not at least grant the pardon immediately afterward. But he must do this without hating a person, without returning evil for evil, without being inflamed with the desire to harm, and without vengeance seeking to feed on even what the law permits. He should not act so that he does not show concern, so that he does not use foresight, so that he does not suppress evils. For it can be that, out of a strong hostility, someone neglects the correction of a person whom he hates very deeply and, by punishing with some penalty, improves another whom he loves very much.

9. For, as you write, "repentance both brings pardon and cancels the sin,"<sup>14</sup> but only that repentance which is performed in the true religion and looks forward to the future judgment of God, not that repentance which for a time is either paraded before human beings or feigned, not in order that the soul may be cleansed from sin for eternity, but in order that life, which will quickly come to an end, may for a time be set free from the present fear of punishment. This is the reason why we believed that the sorrow of repentance was fruitful for those Christians, when they confessed and asked forgiveness, who had been involved in that sin either by not going to the rescue of the church about to be burned or by taking something from those most criminal robberies, and we thought that the presence of faith in their hearts sufficed for their correction, since by that faith they could consider what they ought to fear from God's judgment. But what repentance can heal those who not only take no care to acknowledge the very fountain of forgiveness, but also do not cease to mock and blaspheme her? And we do not, nonetheless, hold any hostility in our heart toward these people, something that is obvious and evident to him whose judgment we fear and whose help we hope for both in the present and in the future life. But we think that we exercise some providential care even for these people if human beings who do not fear God still fear something, not in order that their interests might be harmed, but in order that their vanity might be chastised. Otherwise, in a harmful security they might more seriously offend God himself, whom they scorn, by more audacious actions, and in a much more destructive manner they might hold

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12. See Cicero, *In Defense of Sulla (Pro Sulla)* 8, 25.

13. Letter 103, 3.

14. *Ibid.*

up before others that very same security for their imitation. Finally, we ask God on behalf of those on whose behalf you are asking us that he may turn them back to him in order that, in cleansing their hearts with faith, he might teach them to perform true and salutary penance.

10. See, we love in a more ordered and beneficial way than you—I mean no offense to you—those with whom you think we are angry, to the extent that we pray for them so that they may avoid greater evils and obtain greater goods. If you also loved them by a heavenly gift of God, not by the earthly custom of human beings, and if you wrote back to me with sincerity that you listened gladly when I was urging you to the worship and religion of the most high God,<sup>15</sup> you would not only want these benefits for them, but you would also yourself go ahead of them to these benefits. In that way all the business of your petition before us would be brought to an end with a great and sound joy. In that way, by true and pious love of even this fatherland which gave you birth in the flesh, you would merit that heavenly fatherland. When I was persuading you to look to it, you said that you welcomed this gladly. And then you would truly be looking out for the interests of your people, not for the vanity of temporal joy, nor for a most dangerous impunity for a crime, but for the grace of everlasting happiness.

11. Here I have set forth for you the thoughts and desires of my heart in this case. I do not, however, know—I admit it, for I am human—what lies hidden in God's plan. Whatever that is, I most certainly know that it is more just and more wise and most firmly grounded with an incomparable excellence beyond all the minds of human beings. That is true, of course, which we read in our books, *There are many thoughts in the heart of a human being, but the plan of the Lord remains for eternity* (Prv 19:21). Hence, God himself knows, but we do not know what time may bring, what opportunity or difficulty may arise for us, what choice finally can emerge quite unexpectedly from the correction of present factors or from the hope of them. God knows, but we do not, whether he is so displeased at these actions that they will be punished more severely by that impunity they ask for or whether he will mercifully judge that they should be restrained in the way that we prefer or whether, through a true appeal not to human mercy, but to his own mercy, he may, by some more severe but more salutary earlier punishment of them, turn aside whatever terror was in store for them and turn it into joy. Why, then, should Your Excellency and I labor here in vain with each other ahead of time? Let us set aside for a while a worry whose time has not come, and let us do, if you will, what is always urgent. For there is no time when it is not fitting and necessary to act so that we can please God, and it is either impossible or perhaps very difficult to bring this to such perfection in this life that there is no sin at all present in a human being. Hence, having removed all delays, we must take refuge in the grace of him to whom one can

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15. See Letter 103, 2.

most truly say these words that Virgil spoke to some noble person in his flattering poem, for he admitted that he got them from the Sybil of Cumae as if from a prophetic poem:

With you as leader, if some traces remain of our crime,  
They will be wiped out and free our lands from perpetual fear.<sup>16</sup>

For with him as our leader, after all our sins are absolved and forgiven, we arrive by this path at the heavenly fatherland, for when I commended it to your love as much as I could, you were greatly delighted by the thought of dwelling there.

4. 12. But because you said that all religions seek after it by diverse ways and paths,<sup>17</sup> I fear that, since you suppose that even the way on which you now find yourself leads there, you are perhaps rather slow with regard to holding that one way that alone leads there. But, again looking carefully at the word you used, I think that I can explain your view not unwisely, for you did not say that all religions attain or reveal or discover or enter upon or obtain it or something of the sort by diverse ways and paths. But in saying, "seek after," a word well weighed and considered, you signified not the attainment but the desire to attain it. In that way you did not exclude that way that is the true one, nor did you admit others that are incorrect ones. And that way that arrives there also seeks after it, but not every way arrives there that seeks after that place where anyone who is brought there is undoubtedly happy. We all, however, want to be happy, that is, we seek after this, and yet not all who want this can, that is, attain what we seek after. He, therefore, attains it who not only holds to the way by which one seeks after it, but also the way by which one arrives, leaving the others on journeys of seeking without the end of attainment. For error would not exist if nothing were sought or if the truth sought were possessed. But if you said, "diverse ways," not so that we would understand ways that are opposed, just as we speak of diverse commandments, which, nonetheless, all build up the good life, one concerning chastity, another concerning patience, still another concerning faith, and yet another concerning mercy and any others there are, that fatherland is not only sought after in that fashion by diverse ways and paths, but is also discovered in that fashion. For even in the holy scriptures we read of ways and of a way: of ways, for example, where it says, *I shall teach the wicked your ways, and the impious will turn back to you* (Ps 51:15); of a way, for example, where it says, *Lead me in your way, and I shall walk in your truth* (Ps 86:11). Those ways are not other than this way, but all the ways are the one of which the same holy scripture says in another passage, *All the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth* (Ps 25:10). If they are carefully considered, they lead to a long discourse and a most sweet understanding. I shall postpone that to another time when there is need.

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16. Virgil, *The Eclogues (Eclogae)* IV, 13-14.

17. See Letter 103, 2.



13. But now I think that this is enough for the task I have undertaken of replying to Your Excellency, for Christ said, *I am the way* (Jn 14:6); in him we should seek mercy and truth for fear that, if we should seek elsewhere, we might be in error, holding onto the way that seeks after, but not also the one that leads there. For instance, if we wanted to hold onto this way from which you took the view that all sins are equal,<sup>18</sup> would it not send us as exiles far away from that fatherland of truth and beatitude? For what can be said that is more absurd or more insane than that a person who at some point laughs immoderately and another who savagely sets his fatherland ablaze are judged to have sinned equally? You thought that you should use this way derived from the opinion of certain philosophers, not a different way that still leads to the heavenly dwelling, but a clearly perverse one that leads to the most destructive error, and you did this, not in defense of your own view, but in defense of your fellow citizens in order that we would pardon those barbarians whose fires burned the church, just as we would pardon them if they went after us with some arrogant insult.

14. But see how you support that opinion. You say, "And if, as some philosophers think, all sins are equal, forgiveness ought to be common to all."<sup>19</sup> Then when you try as it were to show that all sins are equal, you go on to say, "Someone spoke rather rudely; he sinned. Another hurled insults and accusations; he sinned equally." This is not to teach but to set forth a perverse opinion without any supporting proofs. To your statement, "He sinned equally," we quickly reply, "He did not sin equally." You are perhaps going to demand that I prove this. After all, how have you proved that he sinned equally? Or must we listen to what you add? "Someone robs the property of another; this too is counted as a sin." Here even you yourself were ashamed. For you were embarrassed to say that he sinned equally, but said, "This too is counted as a sin." But the question here is not whether this too is counted as a sin, but whether this sin is to be set on a par with that one. Or if they are equal because they are both sins, mice and elephants will be equal because they are both animals. Flies and eagles will be equal because they both have wings.

15. You still go further and conjecture, "He violated profane and sacred places; he should not be deprived of forgiveness." Here you have, of course, come to the crime of your fellow citizens concerning the violation of sacred places. Even you have not equated this with rude language. You only sought forgiveness for them, which it is right to ask for from Christians on account of an abundance of mercy, not on account of the equality of sins. But I quoted above the words in our books, *All the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth* (Ps 25:10). They will, therefore, obtain mercy if they do not hate the truth. But this is due to them by the Christian law, not as if to people who sinned equally with those who

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18. See Letter 103, 3.

19. Letter 103, 3.

spoke rather rudely, but to people who are rightly repentant over an immense and impious crime. But you, a man rightly deserving of praise, please, do not teach your son, Paradoxus, to follow these paradoxes of the Stoics,<sup>20</sup> for we desire for you that he will grow up in true piety and happiness. For what more wicked view can a lad from a good family hold or what can be more dangerous to you yourself than if he equates, I will not say parricide, but an insult hurled at his father with an insult hurled at just any stranger?

16. You do well to intercede with us for your fellow citizens, suggesting to us the mercy of Christians, not the sternness of the Stoics, for the latter not only does not help in any way the cause you have taken up, but even works much against it. For the Stoics regard mercy as a failing, though, if we lack it, we could not be moved by any petition of yours or any prayers of theirs. They even completely banish it from the mind of the wise person, whom they want to be absolutely as hard and inflexible as iron. It would have been better if there had come to your mind to cite your Cicero when he praised Caesar, "None of your virtues is more admirable and more pleasing than your mercy."<sup>21</sup> How much more ought that mercy to prevail in the churches since they follow him who said, *I am the way* (Jn 14:6), and they read, *All the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth* (Ps 25:10). Do not, then, fear that we are preparing the death of the innocent, for we do not want even the guilty to come to the punishment they deserve, since that mercy prevents us which we love in Christ along with the truth. But someone who spares sinners and fosters the growth of vices lest he sadden the heart of sinners is not as merciful as one who does not want to snatch a knife from a child, lest he hear his crying, and does not fear the child's being wounded or killed. Save, then, for the appropriate time your plea before us for these people in the love of whom you are not—excuse me for saying this—ahead of us and do not as yet follow us. And write back rather what keeps you from this way which we follow and on which we urge that you walk with us to the fatherland above, where we know and rejoice that you will find joy.

17. You said, however, that, if not all, at least certain citizens of your carnal fatherland are innocent; you did not, nonetheless, defend them, something that you ought to notice when you reread that letter of mine. When, in replying to what you had written, namely, that you wanted to leave your fatherland flourishing, I said that we did not experience their flowers but their thorns, you thought that I was joking.<sup>22</sup> As if we felt like joking amid such great evils! That is, of course, how it is! The ruins of the burned-out church still smolder, and we joke over that matter! And though I did not encounter innocent persons there apart from those who were either absent or had suffered those evils or were

20. Cicero wrote a book called *The Paradoxes of the Stoics* (*Paradoxa Stoicorum*).

21. Cicero, *In Defense of Ligarius* (*Pro Ligario*) 12, 37.

22. See Letter 103, 2.

unable to prevent them by any force or authority, I did, nonetheless, distinguish in my reply the more guilty from the less guilty, and I stated that there is a difference between the case of those who feared to offend the powerful enemies of the Church, the case of those who wanted this crime to be committed, the case of those who committed it, and the case of those who instigated it. I did not want to deal with the instigators because they perhaps could not be discovered without bodily tortures that are abhorrent to our aim. Your Stoics, however, grant that all are equally guilty; also, in linking to this view their severity, by which they disparage mercy, they do not by any means think that all sins should be equally pardoned, but that all sinners should be equally punished. Remove those people as far as you can from the defense of this case, and hope rather that we will act as Christians in order that, as we hope, we may gain for Christ those whom we spare and not in order that we spare them out of an indulgence that is destructive. May the merciful and true God deign to give you true happiness.

## Letter 105

After August of 406 Augustine wrote to the Donatists. He begins by arguing that the love of Christ compels him to write to them because they harm Christ's people (paragraph 1). The Donatist claim that the Catholic Church has survived only in Africa in their sect does not rest on any scriptural argument (paragraph 2). The Donatist violence has brought against them the imperial laws (paragraph 3). Recent acts of violence on the part of the Donatists have brought the anger of God down upon them (paragraph 4). Because they rise up against the peace of Christ, the Donatists suffer justly for their wickedness (paragraph 5).

The whole cause of the Donatists is based on lies (paragraph 6). The Christian emperors issue orders against the Donatists because the emperors hold the truth (paragraph 7). The first Donatists appealed to Constantine against Caecilian, the Catholic bishop, who was acquitted by episcopal courts both in Rome and in Arles (paragraph 8). Constantine first issued laws against the sect of Donatus, and the subsequent emperors followed him in this, except for Julian the Apostate, who helped the Donatists (paragraph 9). The Donatists continue to hold the orders of the emperors in contempt, though they first appealed to the emperor (paragraph 10).

Augustine suggests that both sides should abandon these arguments and cling to peace and unity, for Christ commands this through the emperors who command something good (paragraph 11). Augustine quotes imperial law against the repetition of baptism (paragraph 12). He begs the Donatists to be reconciled with the Catholics who love them (paragraph 13). As the scriptures make Christ known to us, so they make his Church known to us—a Church spread throughout the whole world (paragraph 14). As we recognize Christ in the scriptures, we should recognize his Church there as well (paragraph 15).

Augustine sets aside the question about the traditors at the beginning of the schism and focuses upon the fact that no one becomes guilty because of the sins of others unless he consents to them or approves them, not because he partakes of the sacraments with sinners (paragraph 16). Again, Augustine urges the Donatists to recognize the Church of Christ from the scriptures where they recognize Christ (paragraph 17).

*Augustine, a Catholic bishop, to the Donatists.*

1. 1. The love of Christ, for whom we want to gain every human being to the extent that it is up to our will, does not permit us to remain silent toward you. If you hate us because we preach the Catholic peace, we are serving the Lord who said, *Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God* (Mt 5:9), and in the psalm it is written, *With those who hated peace I was peaceful; when I spoke to them, they attacked me without reason* (Ps 120:7). For

this reason certain priests of your sect have commanded us with the words: "Withdraw from our people if you do not want us to kill you." How much more justly do we say to them: "On the contrary, do not withdraw, but draw near in peace to a people that belongs not to us, but to him to whom we all belong. Or if you are unwilling and are not peaceful, it is you who should withdraw from the people for whom Christ shed his blood, the people you want to make your own so that they are not Christ's, though you try to take possession of them in his name, as if a servant stole sheep from the flock of his master and put his master's brand on any of their offspring so that his theft could not be recognized. Your predecessors, after all, acted in that way; they separated people who had Christ's baptism from the Church of Christ, and they baptized with the baptism of Christ whoever joined them. But the Lord also punishes thieves if they do not mend their ways, and he calls sheep back from error to the flock, and he does not destroy his mark on them."

2. You call us "traitors,"<sup>1</sup> a charge that your predecessors could not prove against our predecessors and that you will in no way be able to prove against us. What do you want us to do? When we say to you that you should listen with patience to our arguments and yours, you do not know how else to act but with pride and insanity. For we would, of course, show you that they were rather traitors who condemned Caecilian<sup>2</sup> and his companions as if for the crime of handing over the sacred books. And you say, "Withdraw from our people," though you teach them to believe you and not to believe Christ. For you say to them that on account of the traitors, whom you do not prove to be such, the Catholic Church has survived in Africa alone in the sect of Donatus, something that you do not read in the law, in a prophet, in a psalm, in an apostle, or in an evangelist, but in your own hearts and in the slanders of your forebears. But Christ says that we must *preach repentance in his name and the forgiveness of sin through all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem* (Lk 24:47). You are not in communion with that Church revealed by the lips of Christ, and, while you drag others into perdition with you, you yourselves do not want to be set free.

2. 3. But if you are displeased with us because you are being forced into unity by the orders of the emperor, you caused this yourselves. For wherever we wanted to preach the truth in order that anyone might hear it in safety and choose it freely, you never permitted it by your acts of violence and terror. Do not scream and upset yourselves; patiently, if possible, consider what we say, and recall the actions of your Circumcellions and the clerics who were always their leaders, and you will see the reason that has brought this upon you. Hence, you complain unjustly because you have forced the emperors to issue these orders

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1. That is, those who handed over the sacred books or vessels during the persecution of Decius in order to avoid martyrdom.

2. Caecilian was the Catholic bishop of Carthage when the Donatist schism began.

against you. For, not to repeat many events that are long past, at least think of your recent actions. Mark, a priest of Casfaliano, became a Catholic by his own choice with no one forcing him. For this reason your people persecuted him, and they would almost have killed him if the hand of God had not subdued their violence through others who arrived on the scene. Restitutus of Victoriano came over to the Catholic Church with no one forcing him. For this reason he was seized from his home, beaten, thrown into the water, clothed in grass, held for I do not know how many days in captivity. And he would perhaps not have been restored to his personal freedom if Proculeian<sup>3</sup> did not see that he was about to be brought before a judge on account of this issue. Marcian of Urga chose the Catholic unity of his own will. For this reason, after he himself had escaped, your clerics attacked his subdeacon who was almost beaten to death with rocks, and their house was destroyed for their crime!

4. Why should I say more? Recently you sent a herald to proclaim to Siniti,<sup>4</sup> "If anyone is in communion with Maximinus, his house will be burned." Why? Before he had converted to the Catholic Church and when he had not yet returned from across the sea, why else did we send a priest to Siniti but that he might visit our people without troubling anyone and preach the Catholic peace to those who were willing, once he was established in a house that was his? And you threw him out of it through a grave injustice. What else were we trying to achieve when one of us, Possidius,<sup>5</sup> the bishop of Calama, went to the estate at Figli so that our people there, who were few in number, might be visited and that those who wanted might, once they heard the word of God, be converted to the unity of Christ? As he was traveling on the road, your people ambushed him like robbers, and because he was able to avoid their ambush, with open violence they almost burned him alive along with the house where he had fled on the estate at Liveti, except that the farm workers of the same estate extinguished the flames set to it the third time on account of the danger to their own safety. And yet, when Crispinus was on account of this action convicted in the court of the proconsul of being a heretic, by the intercession of the same bishop, Possidius, he was not fined ten pounds of gold. With no gratitude for this benevolence and kindness, Crispinus dared to appeal to the Catholic emperors. For this reason he provoked this anger of God, about which you complain, against you in a much more grievous and serious manner.

5. You see that you rise up in violence against the peace of Christ, and you suffer not for him but for your wickedness. What sort of madness is this? When you live bad lives, you do the actions of robbers, and when you are rightly punished, you demand the glory of martyrs! If, then, by your private audacity

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3. Proculeian was the Donatist bishop of Hippo before 410.

4. Siniti was a town in Numida. For Maximinus, see Letter 23, which Augustine wrote to Maximinus when he was the Donatist bishop of the town. He became a Catholic around 406.

5. Possidius was a close friend of Augustine and later wrote his first biography.

you force human beings with such violence to enter into error or to remain in error, how much more ought we to resist your acts of madness through the properly established authorities! God made these authorities subject to Christ according to his prophecy. And in that way poor souls, once set free from your domination, might be rescued from their inveterate error and become used to the clearest truth. For many people, whom you say we force against their will, also want to be forced, as they admit to us before and afterwards, in order that they might at least in that way avoid being oppressed by you.

6. And yet, what is better? To bring forth the true orders of the emperors on behalf of unity or the false concessions on behalf of perversity? You did this latter, and you immediately filled the whole of Africa with your lie. In this action you showed nothing else but that the sect of Donatus, which always places its trust in a lie, is tossed about and carried about by every wind, just as scripture says, *One who puts his trust in falsity feeds the winds* (Prv 10:4). For in the same sense that this concession was true, the crimes of Caecilian were true as well as the surrender of the sacred books by Felix of Aptungi, by whom Caecilian was ordained, and whatever else you are accustomed to say against the Catholics, in order to separate other unhappy people from the peace of the Church of Christ and to remain yourselves in separation from it. But we do not place our trust in any human authority, although it is, of course, much better to put our trust in the emperors than in the Circumcellions, much better to put our trust in the laws than in rebellions. We, however, recall that scripture says, *Cursed is everyone who puts his hope in a human being* (Jer 17:5). If you want to know where we have put our trust, bear in mind him of whom the prophet spoke when he predicted this: *All the kings of the earth will adore him, and all the nations will serve him* (Ps 72:11). And so we use this authority of the Church that the Lord both promised it and gave to it.

7. For, if the emperors were in error—God forbid!—they would issue laws in favor of their error against the truth, and by those laws the good would be tested and receive crowns as their reward for not doing what the emperors commanded, because God forbade it. In that way Nebuchadnezzar had ordered that a gold statue be adored, and those who refused to do this pleased God who forbade such actions.<sup>6</sup> But when the emperors hold the truth, they give orders on behalf of the truth against error, and whoever disregards these orders brings punishment upon himself. For among human beings he pays the penalty, and before God he cannot hold up his head, for he refused to do what the truth itself ordered him to do through the heart of the king.<sup>7</sup> In the same way Nebuchadnezzar was later moved and transformed by the miracle of the preservation of the three youths and passed an edict on behalf of the truth against error so that whoever blasphemed the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would be put to death and their

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6. See Dn 3:1-18.

7. See Prv 21:1.

house would be destroyed.<sup>8</sup> And you do not want the Christian emperors to give such orders against you, though they know that Christ is subjected to insults<sup>9</sup> by you in those whom you rebaptize! If the orders of kings have nothing to do with preaching religion and preventing sacrileges, why at the edict of the king who gives such orders do you also sign yourselves? Or do you not know that these are the words of the king: *I have chosen to announce in my sight the signs and portents that God the most high Lord has produced for me, how great and powerful his kingdom is; his kingdom is everlasting, and his power is for age upon age* (Dn 3:99-100)? And when you hear this, do you not answer, "Amen," and when this is said in a clear voice at the edict of the king, do you not sign yourselves on the holy solemnity?<sup>10</sup> But because you can now achieve nothing before the emperors, you want to cause hatred for us on this account. If, however, you were able to achieve something, how much would you do? For you can achieve nothing, and you still do not give up.

8. Bear in mind that your earliest predecessors referred the case of Caecilian to the emperor, Constantine.<sup>11</sup> Ask us to prove this to you, and if we do not prove it, do with us whatever you can. But because Constantine did not dare to pronounce judgment on the case of a bishop, he delegated it to other bishops to be examined and settled. And this was done in the city of Rome with Melchiades,<sup>12</sup> the bishop of that church, presiding along with many of his colleagues. After he declared Caecilian innocent and imposed a sentence upon Donatus,<sup>13</sup> who produced a schism at Carthage, your predecessors again came to the emperor and complained concerning the judgment of the bishops in which they lost. How, after all, can a bad litigant praise the judges by whose judgment he lost? The most clement emperor, nonetheless, again granted them judges in Arles, a city of Gaul,<sup>14</sup> and your predecessors appealed from them to the emperor until he himself heard the case and declared Caecilian innocent and the others slanderers.<sup>15</sup> Nor did they quiet down after having lost so many times, but they annoyed the emperor with daily appeals concerning Felix of Aptungi, by whom Caecilian was ordained, and they said that he was a traditor and that, for this reason, Caecilian could not be a bishop because he was ordained by a traditor. Finally, Felix himself was declared innocent, when the case was heard by Aelian, the proconsul, at the order of the emperor.<sup>16</sup>

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8. See Dn 3:95-96.

9. Literally, to the rite of exsufflation by which the devil is driven out of the candidate for baptism.  
10. The NBA edition notes that the passage from Daniel was read at the Easter vigil in the Gothic liturgy; perhaps it was used in other liturgies for Holy Saturday as well.

11. See Letter 43 for an account of this appeal.

12. Melchiades was pope from 310 to 314.

13. From Donatus, the bishop of Casae Nigrae in Numidia, the Donatist sect took its name.

14. Thirty-three bishops met in Arles in 314 and upheld the innocence of Caecilian.

15. Constantine announced his verdict at Milan in the fall of 316.

16. Aelian declared Felix innocent at the same time as the Council of Arles.



9. Then Constantine first issued a very severe law against the sect of Donatus. His sons<sup>17</sup> who imitated him issued similar orders. Julian,<sup>18</sup> the apostate and enemy of Christ, succeeded them; when your men, Rogatian and Pontius, beseeched him, he permitted to the sect of Donatus a freedom leading to its own perdition. Finally, he restored the basilicas to the heretics at the same time as he restored the temples to the demons, supposing that in that way the Christian name would perish from the earth, if he showed hatred for the unity of the Church, from which he had fallen away, and allowed freedom to sacrilegious schisms. This was his laudable justice, which the suppliants, Rogatian and Pontius, praised, saying to that apostate that "before him only justice had a place." This man was succeeded by Jovian<sup>19</sup> who issued no orders about such matters since he died soon. Then came Gratian and Theodosius;<sup>20</sup> when you want to, you may read what they determined concerning you. Why, then, are you surprised about the sons of Theodosius,<sup>21</sup> as if they ought to have followed another course in this matter than the judgment of Constantine that was most firmly preserved by so many Christian emperors.

10. But your predecessors, as we said and as we prove to you, when you are willing, if you do not already know it, of their own accord referred the case of Caecilian to Constantine. Constantine has died, but the judgment of Constantine is still alive and is valid against you. Your predecessors referred the case to him to whom they appealed from the episcopal judges, and they often pestered him with pleas about Felix of Aptungi, and each time they returned, condemned and in confusion. And still they did not pull back from the destruction of their heated madness but left it to you, their successors, as your inheritance. As a result, you show your hatred for the orders of the Christian emperors with such impudence, though, if you were permitted, you would not, of course, appeal against us to the Christian Constantine because he favored the truth; rather, you would summon Julian, the apostate, back from hell. But if something of the sort happened, it would be a great evil only for you. What, after all, is a worse death for the soul than the freedom of error?

3. 11. But let us now set all these arguments aside; let us love peace, which everyone, both learned and unlearned, understands should be preferred to discord. Let us love and hold onto unity. The emperors command what Christ also commands, because, when they command something good, Christ alone commands through them. And he also begs us through the apostle that we all say

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17. That is, Constantine and Constans.

18. Julian reigned from 361 to 363.

19. Jovian reigned from 363 to 364.

20. Gratian reigned from 367 to 383, and Theodosius reigned in the East from 379 to 392 and in both the East and the West from 392 to 395.

21. That is, Honorius and Arcadius. Honorius reigned as sole emperor in the West from 395 to 423, and Arcadius reigned as sole emperor in the East from 395 to 402.

the same thing and that there be no divisions<sup>22</sup> among us and that we not say, *I belong to Paul, or I belong to Apollos, or I belong to Cephias, or I belong to Christ* (1 Cor 1:12). Rather, all together we should belong only to Christ, because Christ is not divided, nor was Paul crucified for us.<sup>23</sup> How much less was Donatus! Nor are we baptized in the name of Paul. How much less in the name of Donatus! The emperors say this because they are Catholic Christians, not worshippers of idols, as your Julian was, and not heretics, as certain of them were who persecuted the Catholic Church. For true Christians have not, like you, borne most just penalties for heretical error but have endured most glorious martyrdom for the Catholic truth.

12. Consider the utterly clear truth with which God himself spoke through the heart of the king, which is in the hand of God,<sup>24</sup> in that very law that you claim was issued against you. It was, however, issued for you, if you understand it. Consider what the words of the emperor say, "For, if the rite of baptism is judged invalid in those who were initiated for the first time, because those from whom they received it are considered sinners, it will be necessary that the sacrament that has been conferred be renewed as often as the minister of the conferred baptism is found to be unworthy, and our faith will depend not on the choice of our will nor on the grace of the divine gift but on the merits of the priests and the quality of the clerics."<sup>25</sup> Let your bishops hold a thousand councils; let them reply to this one statement, and we will agree to what you want. See, after all, how perverse and impious you are, when you say what you often say, namely, that, if a man is good, he sanctifies the one he baptizes, but if he is bad and if the person baptized does not know it, then God sanctifies that person. If this is true, people ought to desire to be baptized by those who are bad, but not known to be such, in order that they might be sanctified by God rather than by a human being. But God keep such madness from us! Why, then, do we not speak the truth and hold the correct view when we say that this grace is always God's and the sacrament is God's, but the administration of it pertains to a man? And if he is good, he clings to God and works with God, but if he is bad, God produces through him the visible form of the sacrament, but God himself gives the invisible grace. Let us all hold this view, and let there be no divisions among us.

4. 13. Be reconciled with us, brothers; we love you; we want for you what we want for ourselves. If you hate us more deeply because we do not allow you to go astray and to be lost, tell this to God whom we fear, when he threatens bad shepherds and says, *You have not called back what has gone astray, and you have not sought what was lost* (34:4). God himself does this to you through us by begging, by threatening or by rebuking, by fines or by penalties, through his hidden

22. See 1 Cor 1:10.

23. See 1 Cor 1:13.

24. See Prv 10:1.

25. See *The Theodosian Code (Codex Theodosiana)* 16, 6: "*Ne sanctum baptismum iteretur.*"

warning or chastisements or through the laws of temporal authorities. Understand what he is doing with you; God does not want you to be lost, separated from your Catholic mother in your sacrilegious discord. You were unable at any time to prove anything against us. When your bishops were invited by us to a conference, they always refused to confer peacefully with us, as if they did not want to speak with sinners. Who would put up with this pride? As if the apostle Paul did not converse with sinners and with quite sacrilegious persons! Read the Acts of the Apostles and see. As if the Lord himself did not have discussions about the law with the Jews, by whom he was crucified, and did not answer them appropriately! Finally, the devil is the first of all sinners; he will never be able to be converted to righteousness, and still the Lord did not refuse to reply to him concerning the law.<sup>26</sup> All this was done so that you might understand that those bishops of yours refused to confer with us because they knew that theirs was a lost cause.

14. We do not know why human beings who rejoice over slanderous disagreements boast against one another. In the scriptures we come to know Christ; in the scriptures we come to know the Church. We have these scriptures in common. Why do we not in common hold onto both Christ and the Church in them? Where we recognize him of whom the apostle says, *The promises were given to Abraham and his descendant. It does not say: To his descendants, as if to many, but as if to one: To your descendant, who is Christ* (Gal 3:16), there we recognize the Church of which God says to Abraham, *In your descendant all the nations will be blessed* (Gn 22:18). Where we recognize Christ prophesying about himself in the psalm, *The Lord said to me, "You are my son; today I have begotten you,* there we recognize the Church in the words that follow, *Ask me, and I shall give you the nations as your inheritance and the ends of the earth as your possession* (Ps 2:7-8). Where we recognize Christ in the words of scripture, *The God of gods, the Lord, has spoken,* there we recognize the Church in what follows, *And he called the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting* (Ps 50:1). Where we recognize Christ in the words of scripture, *And like a bridegroom leaving his bedroom, he exulted like a giant to run his course* (Ps 19:6), there we also recognize the Church in what is said a little before, *Their voice went out to all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In the sun he has placed his tent* (Ps 19:5-6). The Church herself is placed in the sun, that is, in being revealed to all up to the ends of the earth. Where we recognize Christ in the words of scripture, *They have pierced my hands and my feet; they have numbered all my bones. They gazed upon and looked at me. They divided my garments and cast lots over my cloak* (Ps 22:17-19), there we also recognize the Church in what is said a little later in the same psalm, *All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the*

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26. See Mt 4:1-10.

*Lord, and all the families of nations will worship in his sight, because the Lord's is the kingship and he will rule over the nations (Ps 22:28-29). Where we recognize Christ in the words of scripture, Be exalted above the heavens, O God, there we also recognize the Church in what follows, And let your glory be over all the earth (Ps 57:6). Where we recognize Christ in the words of scripture, O God, give to the king your judgment and your justice to the son of the king (Ps 72:2), there we also recognize the Church in what is said in the same psalm, And he will rule from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth. Before him men of Ethiopia will bow, and his enemies will lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and the islands will offer presents; the kings of the Arabs and of Seba will bring gifts. All the kings of the earth will adore him, and all the nations will serve him (Ps 72:8-11).*

15. Where we recognize Christ in the words of scripture that a stone cut without hands from the mountain has broken all the kingdoms of the earth, that is, those that put their trust in the worship of demons, there we also recognize the Church where it said that the stone grew and became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.<sup>27</sup> Where we recognize Christ in the words of scripture, *The Lord will prevail against them and will wipe out all the gods of the nations of the earth*, there we also recognize the Church in what follows after that, *And all the islands of the nations, each from its place, will worship in his sight (Zep 2:11 LXX)*. Where we recognize Christ in the words of scripture, *God will come from the south, and the holy one from the shady mountain. His glory will cover the heavens*, there we also recognize the Church in what follows, *And the earth is full of his praise (Hb 3:3)*. Jerusalem, as we read in the Book of Joshua, son of Nun,<sup>28</sup> is located to the south, and from there the name of Christ has spread, and there is found the shady mountain, the Mount of Olives, from where he ascended into heaven in order that his glory might cover the heavens and the Church might be filled with his glory throughout the earth. Where we recognize Christ in the words of scripture, *He was led like a sheep to slaughter, and like a lamb before its shearer he was silent; in that way he did not open his mouth (Is 53:7)*, and the other things that are said there about his Passion, there we also recognize the Church in the words: *Rejoice, O sterile one, you who do not bring forth; burst forth and cry out, you who do not give birth. For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of her who has a husband. For the Lord said: Spread out the place of your tent, and fasten your curtains. Do not hold back. Stretch your cords further; strengthen your firm stakes. Again and again stretch out to the right and to the left. For your offspring will inherit the nations, and you will dwell in cities that are deserted. There is nothing for you to fear. For you will prevail. Do not be embarrassed that you were despicable. For you will forget*

27. See Dn 2:34-35.

28. See Jos 15:8.

*your shame forever; you will not recall the ignominy of your widowhood, because I am the Lord who made you. The Lord is his name. And he who rescues you will be called the God of Israel, the God of all the earth (Is 54:1-5).*

5. 16. We do not know what you say about the traditors, whom you could never convict, never prove guilty. I do not say that in fact it is your predecessors who were shown to have been caught in such a crime and to have confessed to it. Why should the burdens of others concern us, except in order that we might correct those whom we can either by rebukes or by any discipline administered in the spirit of gentleness and with the carefulness of love? But as for those whom we cannot correct, even if for the salvation of the rest they must partake of the sacraments of God with us, let us not, nonetheless, partake in their sins, something that one does only by consenting to them and being in favor of them. In that way, after all, in this world, in which the Catholic Church is spread out through all the nations, this world that the Lord calls his field,<sup>29</sup> we tolerate them like weeds among the grain, or like straw mixed with the wheat on this threshing-floor of unity, or like bad fishes caught with good fishes within the nets of the word and sacrament up to the time of the harvest<sup>30</sup> or of the winnowing<sup>31</sup> or of their being brought ashore.<sup>32</sup> We tolerate them so that we do not uproot the grain on their account. We tolerate them so that we do not cleanse from the threshing floor the bare wheat that was separated before time and cast it out, not to be stored in the barn, but to be gathered by birds. We tolerate them so that, after the nets have been broken by schisms, we do not go out into the sea of destructive freedom while we avoid them like bad fishes. For this reason, after all, the Lord strengthened by these and other parables the tolerance of his servants so that, when good people suppose that they are made guilty by associating with bad people, they do not through human and ill-considered schisms destroy the little ones or themselves perish as little ones. The heavenly teacher warned that we must avoid this to the point that he assured the people, even regarding bad leaders, in order that they would not on their account abandon the chair of the doctrine of salvation, on which even the bad are forced to say things that are good. For what they say does not come from them but from God, who has placed the doctrine of truth on the chair of unity. Hence that true teacher, who is the very truth, said of leaders who commit sins of their own, but speak the good things of God, *Do what they say, but do not do what they do. For they speak, but do not act (Mt 23:3)*. He, of course, would not have said, *Do not do what they do*, unless the evils they do were evident.

17. Let us, then, not perish in an evil schism on account of evil people, though we can show, if you want, that your predecessors were not men who condemned

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29. See Mt 13:24.

30. See Mt 13:42-43.

31. See Mt 3:12.

32. See Mt 13:47-50.

the guilty, but who accused the innocent. But whoever they were and whatsoever they were, let them bear their own burdens. See the scriptures we share; see where we have come to know Christ; see where we have come to know the Church. If you hold onto Christ himself, why do you not hold onto the Church? If on account of the truth of the scriptures you believe in the Christ of whom you read but whom you do not see, why do you reject the Church of which you read and which you do see? By saying these things to you and by compelling you to this good of peace and unity and love we have become enemies in your eyes, and you report that you will kill us who speak the truth to you and do not—to the extent we can—permit you to perish in error. May God prove us right about you in order that he may kill your error in you and you may rejoice with us in the truth. Amen.

## Letter 106

In 409 Augustine wrote to Macrobius, the Donatist bishop of Hippo. He pleads with Macrobius that he not rebaptize a subdeacon from the Catholic communion who has presented himself to the Donatists. Augustine appeals to the case of Felician who broke away from the Donatists and baptized many persons in the schism of Maximian who were not rebaptized when they were reunited with the Donatists.

*To his beloved brother and lord, Macrobius, Augustine sends greetings.*

1. I have heard that you plan to rebaptize a certain deacon of ours. Do not do so! In that way you can live for God; in that way you can please God; in that way you do not have the sacraments of Christ to no purpose; in that way you will not be separated from the body of Christ for eternity. Do not, I beg you, brother, I beg you especially for your own sake; at least pay attention for a while to what I say. Felician of Musti condemned Primian of Carthage, and the former was in turn also condemned by the latter. For a long time Felician was in the sacrilegious schism of Maximian; in it he baptized many in his churches. Now he is your bishop along with Primian, but he does not rebaptize anyone after they have been baptized by Primian.<sup>1</sup> With what right, then, do you think that you should still rebaptize someone after he has been baptized by us? Answer this question for me, and rebaptize me! But if you cannot resolve this question, spare the soul of another, spare your own soul. Or if you accuse me of saying something false about Felician, demand proof from me; if I do not prove it, then, of course, do what you think. I also add that, if I do not prove it, I should not be a bishop of my communion. But if I do prove it, do not be an enemy of your own salvation. I want you, my brother, to be in peace with us.

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1. With regard to these persons, see Letters 51, 2-4; 53, 6; and 108, 13-15.

## Letter 107

Sometime after the previous letter, Maximus and Theodore, two laymen of Hippo, who carried Augustine's letter to Macrobius, the Donatist bishop of Hippo, reported back to Augustine on their meeting with Macrobius. After first refusing to listen to Augustine's letter, the Donatist bishop briefly explains his reason for rebaptizing and for not criticizing his predecessor's actions.

*To Augustine, their most blessed and venerable and highly lovable father, Maximus and Theodore send greetings in the Lord.*

1. According to the command of Your Holiness we went to Bishop Macrobius. When we brought the letter of Your Beatitude to him, he first refused to have us read it to him. Then, at some point moved by our entreaty, he wanted it to be read out for him, and when it had been read, he said, "I cannot but receive those who come to me and give them the faith they have asked for." But when we asked him what he would say about the action of Primian, he said that, as someone recently ordained, he could not be the judge of his father, but that he abides by what he received from his predecessors. We regarded it as necessary to convey this to Your Holiness by this letter. May the Lord keep Your Beatitude, our lord and father.



## Letter 108

Between the end of 409 and August of 410, Augustine wrote this letter to Macrobius, the Donatist bishop of Hippo, who succeeded Proculeian. Augustine complains to Macrobius about his policy of rebaptizing someone who comes to his sect and asks for it (paragraph 1). To Macrobius' reply that he, as newly ordained, dares not to judge his predecessors, Augustine asks why the Donatists judge the Catholics concerning actions done by their predecessors of long ago (paragraph 2). Augustine argues that baptism has made them brothers, for it is Christ who baptizes. Baptism belongs to Christ, though the Donatists subject him to exsufflation when they repeat baptism (paragraph 3). The Donatist bishop, Primian, received back Felician of Musti along with all those he baptized in the sect of Maximian without rebaptizing them. Though Macrobius does not judge Primian for his actions, he judges the whole Catholic world (paragraph 4). Despite the immediate and severe condemnation of Felician, many Donatist bishops received him back in his full priestly dignity (paragraph 5).

Augustine declares to Macrobius that the Donatist case is ended and goes on to demolish the scriptural texts to which the Donatists had appealed, first regarding baptism (paragraph 6) and then regarding participation in the sins of others (paragraph 7). Augustine musters biblical examples of holy men, prophets, and apostles who complained about the mingling of good and evil persons in the world, but did not withdraw from Israel or from the Church on their account (paragraph 8). Augustine acknowledges that the Donatists appeal to the writings of Cyprian in defense of repeating baptism, but points out how much value Cyprian had placed on unity (paragraph 9). Though Cyprian deplored the sins committed by people in the Church, he insisted that one should not withdraw from unity on account of the weeds (paragraph 10). If the Donatists had borne in mind Christ's parable about not separating the grain from the weeds, they would not have split off from the Church (paragraph 11). Augustine uses the parables on the separation of the weeds from the grain, of the chaff from the wheat, of the goats from the sheep, and of the bad fishes from the good to show that schism is unjustifiable (paragraph 12). Augustine uses the case of Felician and Praetextatus to show the inconsistency in the Donatists' position (paragraph 13).

The Donatists boast of the persecutions they have suffered, though the Maximianists have surpassed them in suffering, and it is not mere persecution but persecution for the sake of righteousness that makes one blessed (paragraph 14). After the Donatists condemned Felician and Praetextatus in most severe terms, they readmitted them in their positions of honor without rebaptizing those whom they baptized in their schism (paragraph 15). Either Macrobius must not use the scripture texts the Donatists usually use against the Catholics, or he will be trapped over the case of Maximian (paragraph 16). Hence, Augustine invites Macrobius to the unity of the Church where they might together feed, not their own sheep, but Christ's (paragraph 17) and points to the harm that the loss of unity is causing (paragraphs 18 and 19). Lastly, Augustine offers a final plea for unity and for the tolerance of sinners in the Church (paragraph 20).

*To his beloved brother and lord, Macrobius, Augustine sends greetings.*

1. 1. Since my dearest sons and honorable men<sup>1</sup> brought to Your Benevolence my letter in which I admonished you and asked that you not rebaptize our subdeacon, they wrote back to me that you replied, "I cannot but receive those who come to me and give them the faith they have asked for."<sup>2</sup> And yet, if someone baptized in your communion, who was long separated from you, comes to you and through ignorance thinks that he has to be baptized again and asks for it, after you investigate and learn where he was baptized, you receive the person who comes to you, but you do not, nonetheless, give him the faith he asks for. Rather, you teach him that he has what he asks for, nor do you pay attention to the words of a man in error, but you apply your zeal to correct him. The one, therefore, who gives wrongly what should not now be given and who violates the sacrament that was already given is blamed for his own error; he is not excused by the error of the one making the request. Tell me, therefore, I beg you, how he who asks for it from you does not have what he had already received from me. If it is on account of the water of another and the font of another, as those who do not understand often say because scripture says, *Keep away from the water of another, and do not drink from the font of another* (Prv 9:18 LXX), when Felician<sup>3</sup> was separated from you in the sect of Maximian, he was accused of being "a violator of the truth and a chain of sacrilege," according to the words of your council.<sup>4</sup> If he took with him your font, what was the font in which you baptized your people when he was separated? But if he baptized in the font of another, why did you not rebaptize him? For now your bishop sits together with Primian who was condemned by him and who condemned him.

2. But as our sons who saw you on this matter conveyed to me by their letter, when they asked what you would say about it, you replied that you, as recently ordained, could not be a judge of the actions of your father,<sup>5</sup> but that you abide by what you received from your predecessors. As a result I certainly felt sorrow over your difficult position since I consider you a young man with a good mind, from what I hear. For what forces you to this response but the difficulty of a bad cause? But if you pay attention, my brother, if you think correctly, if you fear God, no necessity forces you to persist in a bad cause. For this answer of yours does not resolve the question I set before you, but frees our cause from all slander from your accusations. After all, you say that, as recently ordained, you cannot be the judge of your father, but abide by what you received from your predeces-

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1. Maximus and Theodore, who wrote Letter 107 to Augustine.

2. Letter 107.

3. Felician of Musti was a Maximianist, that is, a member of a schismatic group that split off from the Donatists in 392, when Maximian was ordained a bishop over against Primian, who succeeded Parmenian as Donatist bishop of Carthage.

4. That is, the Council of Bagai.

5. Macrobius succeeded Proculian as the Donatist bishop of Hippo.

sors. Why, then, do we not rather remain in the Church that we have received from Christ the Lord through the apostles as beginning from Jerusalem and bearing fruit and growing throughout all the nations?<sup>6</sup> And why are we now judged concerning the actions of some fathers of ours that are said to have been committed almost one hundred years ago? If you do not dare to judge concerning your father who is still present in this life and whom you could question, why do you say to me that I should judge concerning someone who died long before I was born? And why do you say to the Christian peoples that they should judge concerning the African traditors<sup>7</sup> who died so many years before and whom so many Christians who were alive then and dwelled in very distant lands could neither hear of nor come to know, even when they were alive? You do not dare judge Primian who remains with us and is known. Why do you impose on me the task of judging Caecilian<sup>8</sup> who died long ago and is unknown? If you do not judge your fathers concerning their actions, why do you judge your brothers concerning the actions of others?

3. Or do you perhaps deny that we are brothers? But we do better to listen to the Holy Spirit who commands us through the prophet, *Listen, you who fear the word of the Lord. Say, "You are our brothers," to those who hate you and despise you in order that the name of the Lord may receive honor and may be seen by them in joy, while they are put to shame* (Is 66:5 LXX). For, if the name of the Lord truly brought more joy to human beings than the name of human beings, would Christ, who cries out, *I give you my peace* (Jn 14:27), be divided in his members by those who say, *"I belong to Paul,"* or *"I belong to Apollos,"* or *"I belong to Cephias"* (1 Cor 1:12) and who are torn asunder by the names of human beings? Would Christ of whom it was said, *This is the one who baptizes* (Jn 1:33), be subjected to exsufflation<sup>9</sup> in his own baptism, Christ of whom it was said, *Christ loved the Church and handed himself over for her in order to make her holy, cleansing her by the bath of water by means of the word* (Eph 5:25-26)? Would he, then, be subjected to exsufflation in his own bath if the name of the Lord, to whom baptism belongs, brought more joy to human beings than the names of human beings of whom you say, "What this one gives is holy, but not what that one gives"?

2, 4. And your colleagues, nonetheless, paid attention to the truth where they wanted, and they thought that not only the baptism that Primian administered in your communion but also that which Felician administered in the sacrilegious schism of Maximian was holy on account of the holy joy over the honor shown to the Lord. And they not only did not dare to violate the character that he had

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6. See Acts 1:8.

7. That is, those who handed over the sacred books or vessels during the time of persecution.

8. Caecilian was the bishop of Carthage at the time when the Donatist schism began; he was accused of having been ordained by a traditor.

9. The rite of exsufflation symbolized the expulsion of the devil from the person to be baptized.

received among you, but after he was corrected they also did not dare to violate that character which, as a deserter, he imprinted upon others outside your sect, because they recognized the mark of the king. You do not want to judge concerning this good action of theirs where you should laudably imitate them, and you follow their judgment in which they deserve to be despised by all. You are afraid to judge concerning Primian for fear that you might be forced to hear what you blame; judge in fact, and you will rather be able to find there what you praise. We do not, after all, want you to bear in mind what Primian did wrongly, but what he did perfectly correctly. In receiving those whom Felician, who condemned him, had baptized in his most wicked schism, he corrected the error of human beings; he did not destroy the sacraments of God. He recognized the good of Christ even in bad human beings, but he corrected the sin of human beings without violating the good of Christ. Or if this action is displeasing to you, at least pay attention to this other point; in accord with your fine mind wisely consider this: You do not judge one man, Primian, concerning the actions of Primian himself, and you judge the Christian world concerning the actions of Caecilian. You are afraid that you will be defiled if you know what you do not dare to punish; acquit the nations, then, which could not know what you accuse them of.

5. Still that was not the action of Primian alone; even you know, I believe, that almost a hundred of your bishops who conspired in that damnable schism with Maximian dared to condemn Primian, and in a council of three hundred and ten of your bishops at Bagai, as the words of its decree proclaim, "The lightning bolt of condemnation expelled Maximian, the adversary of the faith, the violator of the truth, the enemy of mother Church, the minister of Dathan, Korah, and Abiram,<sup>10</sup> from the bosom of peace."<sup>11</sup> Hence, the other twelve who were present at his ordination, when he was elevated to the bishopric in opposition to Primian, were condemned along with him without any delay. But for fear that the schism might become too great, the rest were granted an extra period of time to return by a predetermined day in possession of their full dignity, provided they returned within the time limit. Nor were the three hundred and ten afraid to call back to their company those accused of the great sacrilege of Maximian, having their eyes perhaps on the words of scripture, *Love covers a multitude of sins* (1 Pt 4:8). But those who were granted the extra time baptized outside your communion all those whom they were able to baptize. For they could only have been invited to return within the extra time if they had been outside your communion. Finally, before the extra time ran out and after it had, those twelve who were condemned with Maximian were accused before three or more proconsuls in order that they might be driven from their sees by the power of the courts. Among these were

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10. See Nm 16:1—17:5.

11. See *Answer to Cresconius* III, 22, 24, and 59; IV, 2, 5, and 38.

Felician of Musti, with whom I am presently concerned, and Praetextatus of Assuri,<sup>12</sup> who is recently deceased, and after his condemnation another bishop had already been ordained to replace him. Not Primian alone, but many other bishops of yours, when they were celebrating with a large crowd the birthday of Optatus of Thamugadi,<sup>13</sup> received back these two in their full dignities after their immediate condemnation, after the time limit that was granted to the others had run out, and after the accusation was spread about, even through the turmoil of the courts before so many consuls. And they baptized no one who had been baptized by them. If you reject this claim or deny some part of it, I will be called upon to prove what I said at the risk of losing my office of bishop.

6. The case is ended, Brother Macrobius; God has done this; God willed it. It was due to his hidden providence that in the case of Maximian a mirror for your correction was held up to your eyes in order to bring to an end all the criminal slander against us, in fact against the Church of Christ, which is growing throughout the whole world. I do not mean your own slander, for I do not want to appear insulting to you, but certainly that of your people. For nothing at all has survived of those arguments that people, who do not understand them, are accustomed to bring forth against us, as if they were drawn from the scriptures. After all, they often have on their lips, *Refrain from the water of another* (Prv 9:18, LXX). But we answer: It is not the water of another, though it is in the hands of another. In the same way that was not Maximian's water from which you did not refrain.

Similarly, it is objected to us, *They have become for me like deceitful water that has no faith* (Jer 15:18). We reply: This was said of false human beings who had nothing to do with the sacraments of God, which cannot be deceitful even in persons who are deceitful. For they were certainly deceitful who, as you yourselves admit, condemned Primian on false charges, but the water was not deceitful in which, when separated from you, they baptized those whom they could. For, when you accepted that water in those people whom Felician and Praetextatus baptized outside your communion, you believed that the water was true in those deceitful men.

You object to us: *If one is baptized by someone dead, what good does his bath do?* (Sir 34:30). We answer: If this was written concerning the baptism by which they baptize those whom the Church has expelled as if dead, it did not say that it was not a bath, but that it does no good. And we say that too. Nonetheless, when one comes to the Church with that which he received outside, it does him good within the Church, not when baptism is repeated, but when the baptized person is corrected. In that way the Council of Bagai spoke of Maximian and his compan-

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12. Felician of Musti and Praetextatus of Assuri were Maximianist bishops who were accepted back by the Donatists along with all whom they had baptized without any repetition of baptism for those whom they had baptized.

13. Optatus of Thamugadi was a Donatist bishop who was notorious for his persecution of the Catholics during the time of Gildo.

ions as dead men expelled from the congregation of your communion; it says, "A true wave has cast some members onto sharp rocks as if shipwrecked. The shores are full of the corpses of those who are perishing after the example of the Egyptians; in death itself they receive a greater punishment because they do not receive burial after the loss of life in the vengeful waters."<sup>14</sup> From this crowd of the dead you welcomed Felician and Praetextatus back with their dignities, as if they had come back to life, and you did not rebaptize those baptized by them in that period of death, because you recognized that the baptism of Christ given outside the Church by dead ministers does not benefit those who are dead, but that the same baptism does benefit those who return to life inside the Church.

You object to us: *Let not the oil of a sinner anoint my head* (Ps 141:5). We answer: These words are understood of the smooth and deceptive agreement of the flatterer by which the head of sinners is anointed and swells when they are praised for the desires of their soul and when those who have committed iniquity are spoken well of. This is seen clearly enough from the previous verse, for the whole sentence reads as follows: *The righteous person will correct me and rebuke me with mercy, but the oil of the sinner will not anoint my head* (Ps 141:5). The psalmist said that he prefers to be worn down by the truthful severity of someone merciful rather than to be exalted by the deceptive praise of someone deceitful. But however you understand it, certainly in the case of those whom Felician and Praetextatus baptized in their sacrilege, you either welcomed the oil of sinners, or you recognized that it is the oil of Christ that was conferred even by sinful ministers. After all, they were sinners when it was said of them in the Council of Bagai, "Know that those guilty of an infamous crime have been condemned; by their deadly work of destruction they have glued together a pot filthy from collected trash."<sup>15</sup>

3. 7. It will suffice to have said this concerning baptism. But the reason for your schism is often made to appear good when these testimonies are not understood. Scripture says, *Do not share in the sins of others* (1 Tm 5:22). But we reply: One shares in the sins of others who consents to their evil actions, not one who, though being wheat, still shares, along with the straw, in the divine sacraments as long as the threshing-floor is being winnowed.<sup>16</sup> For scripture says, *Depart from there, and touch nothing unclean* (Is 52:11), and, *One who touches something impure is impure* (Lv 22:4.6), but one who touches by consent of the will, by which the first man was deceived,<sup>17</sup> not by bodily contact, by which Judas kissed Christ.<sup>18</sup> Those fishes, of course, of which the Lord speaks in the

14. See *Answer to Cresconius (Contra Cresconium)* IV, 31.

15. See *Answer to Cresconius* III, 22 and 59; IV, 15 and 39, and *Answer to Gaudentius, a Donatist Bishop* II, 7.

16. See Mt 3:12.

17. See Gn 3:1-6.

18. See Mt 26:49 and Mk 14:45.

gospel, good ones and bad ones within the same net, to which he compares the unity of the Church, all swim, mingled together in terms of their bodies, but separate in their morals, until the end of the world, which is prefigured by the term "shore."<sup>19</sup> After all, scripture says, *A little yeast corrupts the whole lump* (1 Cor 5:6), but of those who consent to evildoers, not of those who, according to the prophet Ezekiel, groan and grieve over the iniquities of the people of God, which are committed in the midst of them.<sup>20</sup>

8. Daniel too bemoans this mixture of good and evil persons; the three men also groaned over it; he did this in prayer, they did it in the furnace.<sup>21</sup> Still they did not separate themselves by a bodily separation from the unity of the people whose sins they were confessing. What great complaints all the prophets spoke against the same people among whom they lived! Still they did not by bodily departure or separation seek another people in which they might live. The apostles themselves tolerated without any contamination of themselves that the devil, Judas, mingled with them up to the end, when he hanged himself with a noose.<sup>22</sup> And so, the Lord said to them on account of the presence of that man in their midst, *And you are clean, but not all* (Jn 13:10). Nor was the whole lump of dough corrupted in them on account of his uncleanness, as if by the leaven of different morals. Nor can one correctly say that his wickedness escaped their notice, except perhaps that by which he was going to betray the Lord. For they wrote of him that he was a thief and had taken from the purse of the Lord everything that was put into it.<sup>23</sup> No one slanderously applied to them the testimony: *You saw a thief and went along with him* (Ps 50:18). For one goes along with the actions of the evil not by sharing with them in the sacraments but by consenting to their evil actions. How much the apostle Paul complained about false brethren,<sup>24</sup> though he was not defiled by bodily contact with them, since he was separated from them by the difference of a pure heart! He in fact rejoiced that Christ was also preached by some of those who he knew were filled with hate,<sup>25</sup> and hatred is, of course, a diabolical sin.

9. Finally, after the Church had spread more widely, there came Bishop Cyprian,<sup>26</sup> a man closer to our times. By his authority you occasionally try to support the repetition of baptism, although that council or those writings, if they are really his and were not, as some think, written under his name and attributed to him, contain his great love for unity and show how he took care by his perfectly frank exhortation that even those with whom he disagreed were to be tolerated in it, for fear that the bond of peace would be broken. He was especially

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19. See Mt 13:47-49.

20. See Ez 9:4.

21. See Dn 9:5-16 and 3:28-31.

22. See Mt 27:4.

23. See Jn 12:6.

24. See 2 Cor 11:26.

25. See Phil 1:18.

26. Cyprian was bishop of Carthage; he suffered martyrdom in 258.

attentive to the fact that, if some human error crept in on certain points on which someone held another view than the truth contains, charity would cover a multitude of sins,<sup>27</sup> as long as fraternal oneness of heart was preserved. He so held onto charity, he so loved it that, if he held another view of baptism than is the truth, God would also reveal this to him, just as the apostle said to the brethren living in charity, *Let as many of us as are perfect hold this view, and if any of you thinks otherwise, God will also reveal this to you. Let us, nonetheless, continue on the path on which we have come* (Phil 3:15-16). There is also the fact that, if the fruitful branch still had something that needed pruning, it was pruned by the glorious sword of martyrdom, not because he was killed for the name of Christ, but because he was killed for the name of Christ in the bosom of unity. For he wrote and most faithfully asserted that those who are outside that unity, even if they die for his name, can be killed, but cannot receive the crown of martyrdom.<sup>28</sup> The love of unity has such great power either for wiping out sins if it is preserved or for reinforcing them if it is violated.

10. The glorious Cyprian deplored that many fell away when the Church was ravaged because of the persecution of the wicked pagans and attributed it to the bad morals of those who were living in the Church a life that deserved to be condemned.<sup>29</sup> He groaned over the conduct of his colleagues and did not cover over his groans in silence. Rather, he says that they had advanced to such great covetousness that, though people were starving, even brethren in the Church, they wanted to have money in abundance, robbed estates by insidious fraud, and increased their capital by compounding interest.<sup>30</sup> I do not think that Cyprian was defiled by the greed, robberies, and usury of these people, nor was he set apart from them by bodily separation but by the difference of his life. He touched the altar with them but he did not touch their unclean life, since he blamed and rebuked it in such terms. Those things are touched when they are approved; they are rejected when they meet with disapproval. Hence, that great bishop lacked neither the severity by which he reprehended sins nor the caution by which he preserved the bond of unity. We read in one of his letters that he wrote to the priest, Maximus, his clear and open view on this question; by it he absolutely commanded, while holding onto the prophetic rule, that one ought never to abandon the unity of the Church on account of the presence in it of evil persons. He says, "For, though we see that there are weeds in the Church, our faith and love ought not to be hampered so that we withdraw from the Church, because we see that there are weeds in the Church. We must only strive to be wheat."<sup>31</sup>

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27. See 1 Pt 4:8.

28. See Cyprian, *The Unity of the Catholic Church* (*De ecclesiae Catholicae unitate*) 14: CSEL 3/1, 223.

29. See Cyprian, *The Fallen Away* (*De lapsis*) 4-6: CSEL 3/1, 239-241.

30. See Cyprian, *The Fallen Away* (*De lapsis*) 6: CSEL 3/1, 241.

31. Cyprian, Letter 54, 3: CSEL 3/2: 622.



11. This law of love was promulgated by the lips of Christ the Lord, for to that love there belong the parables concerning the toleration of the weeds up to the time of harvest in the unity of the field throughout the world and concerning the toleration of the bad fishes within the net up to the time of reaching the shore.<sup>32</sup> If your predecessors, then, held this law in mind, if they thought with the fear of God, they would not split themselves off in a wicked schism from the Church on account of Caecilian and some other Africans, whether they were, as you suppose, truly criminals, or were accused falsely, as is more believable. Cyprian himself described that Church as shedding its rays through all the nations and extending its branches through all the earth with the abundance of its vitality. They would not, I repeat, have split themselves off in a wicked schism from so many Christian nations that were utterly ignorant of who were the accusers, what were the accusations, and who were the accused. A schism comes about only because of a private feud, not for the public benefit, or because of that vice that Cyprian himself mentioned in the following and that he warned must be avoided. For, after he commanded that we must not abandon the Church on account of the weeds that are seen in the Church, he went on and said, "We must only strive to be wheat so that, when the wheat begins to be stored in the barns of the Lord, we may receive the reward of our work and toil. The apostle says in his letter, *In a large house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also ones of wood and clay, and some destined for an honorable purpose, others for a dishonorable purpose* (2 Tm 2:20). Let us work hard and labor as much as we can in order that we may be a vessel of gold and silver. But the Lord, to whom has been given a staff of iron,<sup>33</sup> alone is permitted to smash vessels of clay. A servant cannot be greater than his master,<sup>34</sup> nor can anyone claim for himself what the Father has given to the Son alone so that he believes that he can bring the winnowing fan to winnow and cleanse the threshing-floor or can separate the weeds from the wheat by human judgment.<sup>35</sup> This presumption is proud, and this stubbornness that a base madness takes up is sacrilegious, and since they always claim for themselves something more severe than meek justice demands, they perish from the Church. And while they insolently exalt themselves, they lose the light of the truth because they are blinded by their swollen condition."<sup>36</sup>

12. What is clearer than this testimony of Cyprian? What is truer? You see the light from the gospel and the apostles with which it glows; you see that those who, as if offended, abandon the unity of the Church for their own righteousness are themselves rather most unrighteous. You see that those who would not tolerate weeds in the unity of the Lord's field are themselves outside like weeds.

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32. See Mt 13:24-43 and 47-50.

33. See Ps 2:9 and Rv 2:27 and 19:15.

34. See Jn 13:16 and 15:20.

35. See Mt 3:12.

36. Cyprian, Letter 54, 3: CSEL 3/2: 622-623.

You see that those who would not tolerate such chaff in the unity of a great house are themselves outside like chaff. You see how truthfully scripture says, *A bad son says that he is righteous, but does not excuse his going out* (Prv 30:12 LXX); he does not justify, excuse, defend, or show to be pure and free from sin his going out, that is, his going out from the Church. After all, that is what *he does not excuse* means. For, if he did not say that he was righteous but was truly and genuinely righteous, he would not in a most impious fashion abandon the good on account of sinners, but would endure sinners with great patience on account of the good until at the end of the world the Lord, whether by himself or through his angels, separates the weeds from the grain,<sup>37</sup> the chaff from the wheat,<sup>38</sup> the vessels of anger from the vessels of mercy,<sup>39</sup> the goats from the sheep,<sup>40</sup> the bad fishes from the good ones.<sup>41</sup>

4. 13. But if you are trying to interpret in some other sense than that which the meaning of the words of God demands those testimonies of the scriptures that your predecessors believed that they should either understand or cite in order to divide the people of God, stop this now! Pay attention to that mirror which God raised up to admonish you with a most merciful foresight, if only you will be wise. I speak of the case of Felician, “the opponent of the faith, the violator of the truth, the enemy of mother Church, the minister of Dathan, Korah, and Abiram,” as was proclaimed in the Council of Bagai. They went on to add further about him that the earth did not open up and swallow him, but that he was left among the living for greater punishment. They said, “If he were carried off, he would have had his punishment in the swiftness of death, but now he will suffer more grievous penalties than death when he is dead among the living.”<sup>42</sup> I ask you whether those who conspired with him and condemned the innocent Primian touched this man, who was then an unclean corpse. For, if they touched him, they were certainly defiled by touching someone defiled. Why, then, are those who are in communion with the same man and are separated from communion with you granted extra time for returning as if they are innocent persons, “in order that upon their return they may be assured of having their unimpaired dignity and faith”? And why did those who were not present at the ordination of Maximian deserve to hear that “the cuttings of the sacrilegious vine did not pollute them”? They were, after all, gathered in the same sect, in the same schism, divided from you, allied with them, together here in Africa, most well known, closest friends, and most tightly linked together. Though not present, they ordained Maximian and condemned the absent Primian on his account.

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37. See Mt 13:24-30.

38. See Mt 3:12.

39. See Rom 9:22-23.

40. See Mt 25:31.

41. See Mt 13:47-50.

42. See Augustine, *Answer to Cresconius (Contra Cresconium)* III, 19, 22 and IV, 4, 5.

Are you going to say that the vine of Caecilian defiled countless, far distant, and completely unknown Christian peoples of the world, though many of them could not know, I do not mean his case, but not even his name? And do those who not only knew the sin of Maximian, but elevated him, raising him to the bishopric in opposition to Primian, not share in the sins of the others, while those people do share in the sins of others, who either in distant nations did not know that Caecilian was made a bishop, or who in less distant peoples only heard of it, or who in Africa simply and quietly came to know it, or who in the church of Carthage did not raise him to the episcopacy in opposition to anyone?<sup>43</sup> And did those not go along with a thief<sup>44</sup> who were in communion with the person of whom Nummasius, the lawyer, said, while speaking in defense of your present bishop, Restitutus, that "he took possession of the episcopal office by a sacrilegious and almost hidden theft"? And did not they, who were in communion with an adulterer of the truth, throw in their lot with an adulterer?<sup>45</sup> And was not their whole lump of dough corrupted by a little yeast<sup>46</sup> when they favored him, when they remained in his sect cut off from you? And it was not as if they were ignorant; rather, they took care that his sect be cut off from you and raised up against you. Finally, you yourselves invited them to return in such a way that you said that those who were in such close union with Maximian were not polluted by the vine of sacrilege. After all, you received back Praetextatus and Felician with all their dignities; you are peacefully reconciled with them; even today you see Felician seated with you. And yet you have not been stained by sharing in the sins of others; you have not been defiled by any contact with uncleanness; you have not been corrupted by the yeast of wickedness. But the Christian world is accused of the crime of others by means of these testimonies; the division of the unity is defended in your deadly schism, and the branch that remains attached to the root of its true mother is accused of being an unclean branch by the branch that is cut off!

5. 14. Why is it that you so often boast of the persecutions you have endured? If it is not the reason but the penalty that makes one a martyr, when scripture said, *Blessed are those who suffer persecution*, it uselessly added, *on account of righteousness* (Mt 5:10). Do not the Maximianists easily surpass you in this claim to glory? After all, they underwent persecution not only afterwards with you, but earlier and at your hands. Those words that I quoted a little before are those of the lawyer who accused Maximian in the presence of your colleague, Restitutus, who had already been ordained to succeed Salvius of Membressa, who was condemned along with those other eleven without any delay, before the date of the extension passed. Once the date of the extension was passed, Titian also

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43. The CSEL edition indicates that there is a lacuna here.

44. See Ps 50:18.

45. See Ps 50:18.

46. See 1 Cor 5:6.

accused Felician and Praetextatus in most severe terms of the whole plot against Primian. The Council of Bagai was quoted in the proconsular record, and not just once, as well as later in the municipal records. Judicial processes were set in motion; the most menacing orders were asked for and obtained; those resisting were led to punishment; the assistance of the state was granted so that the judicial decision might be carried out. Why, then, do you quarrel with us over persecution that you endured, since we shared in it with you, but not with equal justice? For, since one who undergoes persecution does not always suffer death, your clerics and the Circumcellions arranged things between us so that you would undergo persecution but that we would undergo death. But, as I said, do battle with the Maximianists over this claim to praise. For they recite against you the legal records in which you went after them by persecutions through judges, but you were clearly reconciled afterwards with certain of them, after they had been corrected by such coercive measures. Hence, we should not despair of our reconciliation if God deigns to help and to inspire you with a mind for peace. For what your sect is accustomed to say against us with slanderous rather than truthful lips, *Their feet are quick for the shedding of blood* (Ps 14:3), is something that we have rather experienced in the great pillaging of the Circumcellions and of your clerics. For they have torn apart human bodies in the fiercest slaughter and have bloodied so many places with the blood of our people. When you entered this city, their leaders accompanied you with their gangs, shouting, "Praise be to God," amid their songs, and they used these cries like trumpets of battle in all their brigandage. On another day, they were struck and stirred up by the goads of your words, which you hurled at them through a Punic interpreter with an honest and genuine indignation filled with frankness, and you were angered by their actions rather than delighted by their services. They tore themselves from the midst of the congregation, as we were able to hear from those who were present and recounted it, with the gesture of madmen. And after their feet that were quick for the shedding of blood, you did not purify the pavement of the church with any salt water—something that your clerics thought that they should do after our feet.

15. But, as I began to say, this testimony from the scriptures that you are accustomed to toss about more by way of insult than as proof, *Their feet are quick for the shedding of blood* (Ps 14:3), was also vomited forth in that pompous statement of the Council of Bagai in its fierce attack on Felician and Praetextatus. For, after they had said what they thought should be said about Maximian, they said, "The well deserved death for his crime not only condemns this man, but the chain of sacrilege also drags very many into complicity in the crime. Of these it is written, *The venom of vipers is under their lips, and their mouth is filled with cursing and bitterness. Their feet are quick for the shedding of blood*" (Ps 139:3 and 14:3), and so on. Then, having said that, in order to show who they were whom the chain of sacrilege drags into complicity in the crime

and to condemn those united with Maximian with a similar severity, they said, "Victorian of Carcaviana, then, was guilty of the notorious crime," to whom they add the other eleven, among whom were Felician of Musti and Praetextatus of Assuri. After these things were said against them, a great reconciliation was produced with them with the result that none of them lost their dignities. No one baptized by them was judged to need baptism after the baptism of those who washed those feet that were quick for the shedding of blood. Why, then, should we despair of our reconciliation? May God turn aside the hatred of the devil, and may the peace of Christ conquer in our hearts,<sup>47</sup> and, as the apostle says, *Let us forgive one another if anyone has a complaint against someone, as God has also forgiven us in Christ* (Col 3:13), in order that, as I have already said and as it must often be said, love may cover over a multitude of sins.<sup>48</sup>

6. 16. But, my brother, you with whom I am now dealing and over whom I desire to rejoice in Christ, as Christ himself knows, the case of Maximian is still fresh in the memory of people still living, against whom these actions were taken, and all these actions are also attested to in so many municipal and proconsular records. Hence, if you want to use the ability of your mind and eloquence to take up the defense of the sect of Donatus in the case of Maximian and if you do not want to act deceitfully, will you not take refuge in the bastion of the truth that has always warned the Catholic Church against you? Then you will admit that the passages about the water of another and about the water of deceit and about the bath of a corpse and any other passage of this sort that there may be should not be understood as you usually do. Rather it should be understood in such a way that the baptism of Christ, which was given to the Church in order that we might partake of eternal salvation, should not be judged foreign to the Church when it is conferred outside the Church and should not be regarded as belonging to others when others have it. Rather, in those outside the Church and separated from the Church it contributes to their destruction, but in those who belong to her and are her own it produces salvation. In the former, when they are converted to the peace of the Church, their error is corrected, but the sacrament is not destroyed when the error is punished. Rather, what was an obstacle for those misguided people externally begins to benefit them internally once they have been corrected. And you will not interpret those passages about not sharing in the sins of others, about separation from sinners, about not touching someone unclean and polluted, about avoiding the corruption of a measure of grain, and other such passages, as you usually interpret them. Otherwise, you will be trapped in the case of Maximian with no way of getting out. Rather, you will wisely state and will hold onto what sound doctrine teaches, what the true rule of faith proves by examples from the prophets and apostles, namely, that we should

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47. See Col 3:15.

48. See 1 Pt 4:8.

tolerate sinners so that the good are not destroyed rather than that we should abandon the good in order that sinners be kept separate. Only let the good be separate from the reprobate in the imitation of them, in the agreement with them, and in the likeness of their life and conduct, while they both grow together, mingled together in tribulation, gathered together within the nets, up to the time of harvest, of winnowing, and of the shore. But with regard to persecutions, how are you going to defend whatever your people did by means of judges to expel and drive the Maximianists from their sees, unless you claim that your wiser leaders did this by producing a moderate fear in them with the intention of correcting them, not of harming them? But if they went beyond the human limit, as in these sufferings that the city itself testifies Salvius of Mambressa endured, what are you going to say but that this cannot be turned against the other Donatists who were living in one communion of the sacraments, as straw is mixed with the grain, but separate by the difference of their life?

17. Since this is so, I welcome this defense of yours. It will, of course, be this sort of defense if it is truthful, and it will be conquered by the truth if it is not. I welcome, I repeat, this defense of yours, but you see that it is also mine. Why, then, should we not labor together to be grain in the unity of the Lord's threshing floor? Why should we not tolerate together the chaff? Why not, I ask you? What is the reason? For whose benefit? For what advantage? Tell me! Unity is put to flight so that people purchased by the blood of the one Lamb are fired up against one another by their opposing desires, and the sheep belonging to the head of the house are divided among us, as if they were our own. He said, *Feed my sheep* (Jn 21:17); he did not say, "Feed your own sheep." And of those sheep he said, *That there may be one flock and one shepherd* (Jn 10:16). He cries out in the gospel, *By this all will know that you are my disciples if you have true love for one another* (Jn 13:35), and, *Allow both to grow until the harvest for fear that, when you want to gather the weeds, you will at the same time uproot the grain* (Jn 13:30). Unity is put to flight so that a husband goes to one church and a wife to another. He says, "Hold onto unity with me because I am your husband," and she replies, "I am staying where my father is." In that way they divide Christ in one bed, while we would detest them if they divided the marriage bed. Unity is banished so that relatives, fellow citizens, friends, guests and all united to one another in human relationships, all of them Christians, are in harmony in attending banquets, in entering into marriages, in buying and selling, in pacts and agreements, and in all their interests and affairs, but are out of harmony with regard to the altar of God. For, however great the disagreement stemming from elsewhere, people ought to put an end to the discord there and first be reconciled with their brethren and then offer their gift on the altar. But though elsewhere they are in agreement, they are in disagreement at the altar.

18. Unity is banished so that we seek civil laws against the evil actions of your people—I do not want to say your evil actions—and the Circumcellions arm

themselves against the laws, which they scorn because of that very madness by which they are aroused against you when they are in a rage. Unity is banished so that the audacity of farmhands rises up against their bosses, and in opposition to the teaching of the apostle<sup>49</sup> fugitive servants not only abandon their masters but even threaten their masters. They not only threaten them but plunder them with most violent attacks, with members of your heresy as their instigators and leaders and principal agents in the crime itself. With the cry, "Praise be to God," they offer you honor; with the cry, "Praise be to God," they shed others' blood! As a result, to avoid the hatred of human beings, after having gathered your people and questioned them, you promise that you will return the estates to those from whom they were taken. And you do not, nonetheless, will this in such a way that you may be able to fulfill your promise, for fear that you would be unduly forced to offend the audacity that your priests considered necessary for themselves. They boast of their previous merits in your regard, pointing out and enumerating, prior to this law because of which you rejoice over the freedom restored to you,<sup>50</sup> how many places and basilicas your priests held by means of them, while ours were assaulted and put to flight. And so, if you wanted to be severe with them, you would be seen as ungrateful for their benefits.

19. Unity is banished so that whoever among us refuses to put up with discipline flees to the Circumcellions for defense and is presented to you to be rebaptized. For example, this subdeacon from the country, Rustician, on whose account I was compelled to write these things to you with great sorrow and fear,<sup>51</sup> was excommunicated by his priest because of his wicked and perverse behavior. He also became indebted to many in the territory, and he did not seek any other protection against the disciplinary measures of the Church and against his creditors but that he should receive a new wound to his soul from you<sup>52</sup> and be loved by the Circumcellions as someone utterly pure. Your predecessor already rebaptized such a deacon of ours, one who was also excommunicated by his priest, and he made him your deacon. Not many days later, having joined in the audacity of those same wicked men, as he desired, he was killed in a night attack in the midst of his robbery and arson, at the onrush of a crowd that came to help. These are the fruits of this division that you do not want to heal, since you flee from unity as you ought to flee from this division, which is ugly in itself and damnable in the eyes of God, even if other actions that are so horrible and wicked were not caused by it.

7. 20. Let us recognize, then, my brother, the peace of Christ, and let us together hold onto it, and, to the extent that God grants, let us together strive to be

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49. See Ti 2:9.

50. Toward the end of 409 the emperor, Honorius, granted some freedom to the Donatists, but it was revoked in August of 410 because of the violence of the Circumcellions.

51. See Letter 106.

52. That is, that he should be baptized again.

good and together strive, while preserving unity, to correct sinners with as much discipline as we can, and on account of this unity let us tolerate sinners with as much patience as we can. Otherwise, as Christ warned,<sup>53</sup> when we want to gather the weeds up beforetime, weeds that blessed Cyprian testified are seen and clearly seen, not outside, but within the Church,<sup>54</sup> we might at the same time uproot the grain as well. For you really do not have particular privileges of holiness all your own so that our sinners defile us but your sinners do not defile you, and so that the fear of the traditors from long ago, of which we are ignorant, contaminates us but the present audacity of the wicked, which you see, does not contaminate you. Let us recognize that ark that prefigured the Church; let us together be the clean animals in it, and let us not refuse also to carry in it along with us the unclean animals until the end of the flood. For they were together in the ark, but they did not together please the Lord in the odor of sacrifice. For after the flood Noah did not offer to the Lord a sacrifice from the unclean animals.<sup>55</sup> The clean animals did not, nonetheless, abandon the ark ahead of time on account of the unclean animals. Only the raven abandoned it and separated itself from the communion of that ark before time, but it was from among the two pairs of unclean, not from the seven pairs of clean ones.<sup>56</sup> Let us detest the uncleanness of this separation. For this separation by itself makes worthy of damnation those who are worthy of praise because of their conduct. For *a bad son says that he is righteous, but does not excuse his going out* (Prv 30:12 LXX), though, insolently raised up and blinded by his pride, he dares to say what the prophet foresaw and detested, *Do not touch me for I am clean* (Is 65:5). Whoever, therefore, abandons beforetime, as if on account of the uncleanness of certain people, the assembly of this unity, like the ark in the flood carrying clean and unclean animals, shows that he himself is rather what he is fleeing. The Lord willed that in this city also your people by the lips of a certain person. . . .<sup>57</sup>

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53. See Mt 13:29.

54. See Cyprian, Letter 54, 3: CSEL 3/2, 622.

55. See Gn 8:20.

56. See Gn 8:6.

57. At this point there is a lacuna of approximately twenty lines in the manuscripts.



## Letter 109

Severus, the bishop of Milev in Numidia, wrote to Augustine. The date of the letter is unknown. Severus effusively expresses his joy over the chance to converse with Augustine and asks Augustine to feed and enlighten him with the truth God has disclosed to him (paragraph 1). He thanks God for Augustine's goodness and expresses the desire to be as good a man as Augustine is (paragraph 2). Finally, he pleads with Augustine to send him a letter (paragraph 3).

*To his venerable and beloved bishop who should be embraced with the whole warmth of love, Severus sends greetings.*

1. Thanks be to God, Brother Augustine, who gives us all the good joys we have. I confess, my joy is to converse with you. I read your writings very often. I shall say something strange, but clearly true: As your presence is often absent for me, so your absence has become present for me. No stormy activities of temporal affairs stand between us. I do as much as I can, even if I do not do as much as I want. But why should I say: As much as I want? You know very well how much I long for you. I do not, nonetheless, complain that I do not do as much as I want, because, once again, I do not do less than I can. Thanks be to God, my dearest brother, my joy is to converse with you, and I rejoice when more closely united with you. And clinging to you in the greatest oneness, so to speak, and receiving the overflow of your breasts, I gather strength, as much as I can, in order to be able to squeeze and press them. Thus, if it is possible, with the flesh removed that they give to the still nursing child to suck, may your heart and soul graciously pour out for me whatever they keep that is more secret and more hidden. Let them pour out for me, if possible, your heart. I desire, I repeat, that your heart be poured out for me, your heart rich with heavenly food and seasoned with every spiritual sweetness, your heart, your pure heart, your heart that is simple, except that it is garlanded with a double chain of a pair of loves, your heart, a heart drenched with the light of truth and reflecting the truth. I make myself subject to its emanation or refugence in order that my night may fade away in your light so that we may walk together in the brilliance of the daylight. O truly crafty bee of God, fashioning honeycombs full of God's nectar and pouring out mercy and truth; my soul experiences delight as it savors them, and whatever it finds less or feeble in itself, it tries to repair and sustain with such vital nourishment.

2. The Lord is blessed by the preaching of your lips and by your faithful ministry, which you make to harmonize with and respond to the Lord as he sings to you, so that whatever of his fullness overflows until it reaches us is made more pleasant and delightful by your excellent stewardship, your eager purity, and

your faithful, chaste, and single-minded service. You make it shine forth through your fine expressions and your watchfulness so that it would draw the eyes and pull them to it if you did not point to the Lord in order that we should acknowledge that whatever delightfully shines forth in you comes from him, and we refer it to him, because of whose goodness you are so good, because of whose purity, simplicity, and beauty you are so pure, simple, and beautiful. And as we give thanks to him for your goodness, may he deign by his gift to unite us to you or somehow to subject us to you in order that we may be more fully subject to him, by whose guidance and governance we rejoice that you are such a good man. Thus may it turn out that you rejoice over us, and I am confident that you will, if you help me by your prayers, for I have already made some progress by imitating you, so that I desire to be the sort of man you are. See what you are doing, because you are so good, how you bring us to a love of our neighbor, which for us is the first step toward the love of God and the last step and boundary, as it were, which joins the two loves of God and of neighbor to each other. Standing, as I said, on this boundary line, as it were, of these two, we feel the warmth and are aflame with the love of both. But to the extent that this fire of love for the neighbor burns and purifies us, to that extent it forces us to enter into that purer love of God. No limit in loving is already set for us in that love. For in this case the limit is to love without limit. We need, then, have no fear that we may love our Lord too much, but must fear that we may not love him enough.

3. The previous part of this letter presents me to you as rather happy, as if my sadness were wiped away by the joy from the leisurely free time that I was allowed to pass with you when I was in the country, for that was truly fortunate. I wrote this letter, of course, before a venerable bishop was so gracious as to pay me a visit, which was the extreme of those joys. And what really surprised me, he arrived on the same day the letter was written. Why is this, I ask, O my soul, except that it gives us delight? And yet, though this delight is good in itself, it is not really useful, because it is only partial. Meanwhile, we give to the whole this part, namely, ourselves, to the extent that the matter allows in view of our sins, and we strive to make ourselves more polished and companionable, if you allow that word. You have my letter, which is rather long, not in proportion to your greatness, but in proportion to my smallness, by which I would induce you to send to me a letter, not in proportion to my smallness, but in proportion to your greatness. And however long it is, it will, nonetheless, not be long for me, because for me the whole of time is short for reading a letter from you. Write to me when and where I ought to meet you on account of that matter about which you commanded me to meet you. If the case is not prejudiced and no better decision has been reached, I will meet you then. If not, I beg you, I do not want to be distracted from my course. For that one matter that I proposed to you alone seemed good to me. I greatly long for and greet all the brothers, who along with us are fellow servants in the Lord.

## Letter 110

Following the previous letter, though at an uncertain date, Augustine replied to Severus, the bishop of Milev, who had asked him for a letter. Augustine thanks Severus for his letter and acknowledges that he owed Severus a reply (paragraph 1). For the sake of Severus' modesty he refrains from praising Severus as Severus had praised him (paragraph 2), and he claims not to find in himself all that Severus has praised in him (paragraph 3). Since Severus and he know each other so well, when one praises the other, it is as though each is praising himself (paragraph 4). Justice demands that we repay debts before we give gifts, and for this reason Augustine pleads that he must use the little time he has for the needs of his ministry (paragraph 5). Finally, he asks that Severus should not impose upon him further duties of writing and should keep others from doing so (paragraph 6).

*To my most blessed lord and most charming, venerable, and much beloved brother and fellow priest, Severus, and to those brothers who are with you, Augustine and the brothers who are with me send greetings in the Lord.*

1. My letter, which our dearest son and fellow deacon, Timothy, has brought you, was already prepared for him as he was about to depart, when our sons, Quodvultdeus and Gaudentius, arrived here with your letter. Hence, it turned out that Timothy, who was immediately departing, did not carry my answer. For, though he delayed with us for a certain time after their arrival, he seemed about to depart from minute to minute. But even if I had replied by his services, I would still be in your debt. For even now that I seem to have replied, I still owe you a debt. I do not mean a debt of love, which the apostle says we owe more to the extent that we love more. The apostle shows that we always have the debt of love when he says, *Owe no one anything except that you love one another* (Rom 13:8). Rather, I owe you for your letter. For when will I measure up to your sweetness and the great desire of your mind, which your letter revealed to me when I read it? It, of course, conveyed to me something that was very well known about you. Though it did not tell me anything new, it did, nonetheless, make a new demand for a response.

2. You perhaps wonder why I say that I am not equal to the debt I owe, since you, who know me as my own soul does, know so much about me. But this is precisely what causes me a great difficulty in replying to your letter. For on account of your modesty I hold back from saying how high an opinion I have of you, and, of course, in saying less about you, when you heap such great praise on me, what shall I continue to be but in debt to you? I would not care about this if I knew that what you said to me about me was said not from a most sincere love but from hostile flattery. In this way I would, of course, not become indebted to

you, because I would not owe you such a recompense, but the more I know that you speak with an honest heart, the more I see how much more I am indebted to you.

3. See, however, what has happened: I in some sense praised myself when I said that I was honestly praised by you. But what else should I have said than what I mentioned about you, who know me so well? See, I have raised a new question for myself, which you did not raise, and you are perhaps waiting for me to resolve it. Thus it was not enough for me that I was in debt unless I piled on myself an even greater debt. But it is easy to show and easy for you to see, even if I do not show you, that one can dishonestly say what is true and honestly say what is not true. For one who believes as he speaks, even if he does not speak the truth, speaks honestly. But one who does not believe what he says, even if he speaks the truth, speaks dishonestly. Do I, then, have any doubt that you believe about me those things you have written? Though I do not recognize in myself what you have written, you could have honestly said of me what is not true.

4. But I do not want you to be misled in that way even by your goodwill, and I am indebted to that goodwill because I can say of you what is true both with honesty and with goodwill, except, as I said above, that I would hold back on account of your modesty. But when I am praised by someone who is utterly genuine and very close to my soul, I consider it as if I were praised by myself. You see how annoying this is, even if the truth is spoken. How much more annoying is it that, even though you are my other soul—in fact your soul and mine are one—you are mistaken about me in thinking that I have certain things that I lack! It is just as if one man is mistaken about himself. I not only do not want this for fear that you whom I love may be mistaken but also for fear that you may pray less that I may be what you already believe me to be. Nor am I indebted to you to the point that, by the same increase in goodwill I should believe and say about you good things that even you know that you still do not have. Rather, I am indebted to you to the point that, with a heart filled with such goodwill, I speak only of your good qualities, gifts of God, about which I am certain in your case. I refrain from doing this, not in order that I may not be mistaken about them, but in order that, when I have praised you, you do not seem to have been praised by yourself, and on account of that rule of justice by which I do not want to be treated in that way. Even if it should be done, I choose to be the one in debt, as long as I believe that it should not be done. But if it need not be done, I am not in debt either.

5. I know, however, what you can reply to me about this: “You say these things as if I desired a lengthy letter from you full of praises for me.” Heaven forbid that I should believe this of you. But your letter, so full of praises for me (and I do not want to say how true or not true they are), demands of me that I consider this, even if you do not want it. For, if you wanted me to write something else, you desired me to give you a gift, not to repay a debt. Now, the order

of justice demands that we first repay debts and then, if we want to, that we give some gift to the one whom we have repaid. And yet, with the sort of things that you desired that I should write, if we carefully consider the commandments of the Lord, we repay a debt rather than give a gift if we ought to owe no one anything but that we love one another.<sup>1</sup> Love itself, of course, imposes a debt that, in the service of fraternal love, we should, in whatever way we can, help someone who rightly wants to be helped. But, my brother, I believe that you know how many tasks have fallen into my hands, and for those tasks scarcely a very few drops of time are available to me on account of the different concerns that the needs of our ministry entail. And if I use those few drops for other things, I would consider myself to be acting against my duty.

6. I admit it; I do in fact owe you what you want, namely, that I write you a long letter. I owe this, of course, to your desire, which is so sweet, so sincere, and so pure. But because you are a good man, who loves righteousness, I warn you that you should gladly listen to this from me about what you love. You see that what I owe to you and to others is more important than what I owe only to you, and I do not have enough time for everything since I do not have enough even for the more important things. Hence, all those who are very dear and very close to me—and you are for me among the first of them in the name of Christ—will do something that is truly their duty, if they not only do not impose upon me other things to write, but also prevent others from doing so with as much authority and holy kindness as they can. Otherwise, I may seem hardhearted when I do not grant individuals what they request, since I prefer to repay the debt I owe to all. Finally, when, as we hope and in accord with your promise, Your Reverence comes to us, you will know with what literary works I am busy and how busy I am, and you will do with more insistence what I have asked, namely, that you will also ward off from me others whom you can, when they want to impose upon me something else to write. My most blessed lord, may the Lord our God fill the great and holy bosom of your heart, which he himself has made.

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1. See Jn 13:34 and 15:12,17, Rom 12:10 and 13:8, 1 Jn 4:7, 1 Thes 4:9, and 1 Pt 1:22.

## Letter 111

Toward the end of 409, Augustine wrote to Victorian, a priest who was disturbed by the violence inflicted by the barbarian attacks. Augustine begins by admitting the great sufferings and slaughters that are being perpetrated throughout the world and even in Africa by Donatists. He refers to the Visigoths, who under Alaric invaded Italy at this time and captured Rome in 410, as well as to the Vandals who were invading Gaul and Spain during the same years. It is not clear which barbarians may have troubled the Egyptian monks. They were hardly Germanic tribes but most likely some African people who found the monks easy marks (paragraph 1). Augustine replies to the accusations of pagans that such sufferings began only after the proclamation of the Christian religion (paragraph 2). He also explains why God allows some holy women to be slain or taken captive by appealing to the words of Azariah in the Book of Daniel (paragraph 3). He further cites Daniel who confessed his sins and acknowledged that he was rightly suffering for his sins (paragraph 4). He argues that God does not abandon his holy women who were taken captive (paragraph 5) and warns that it is wrong to murmur against God when one is suffering trials and tribulations (paragraph 6). Augustine tells Victorian the story of the niece of Bishop Severus, who was taken captive from Sitifis and won her release when God heard her prayers for the health of her captors (paragraph 7). He urges Victorian to pray for the captive religious women and compares their lot to that of Azariah (paragraph 8). Finally, he reminds Victorian that chastity is not lost if one's body is violated without any consent and urges him to read the scriptures (paragraph 9).

*To his most beloved lord and dearest brother and fellow priest, Victorian, Augustine sends greetings in the Lord.*

1. Your letter in which you asked that I respond to various questions with a lengthy work filled our heart with a great sorrow, for such evils deserve lengthy groans and weeping rather than lengthy books. The whole world is indeed afflicted with such great slaughters that there is hardly any part of the earth where such outrages as you report are not committed and bewailed. For, even in the deserts of Egypt where the brothers chose monasteries separate from all uproar, as if they were secure, they were a short while before slain by the barbarians. And now I also do not think that the unspeakable crimes committed in regions of Italy and in Gaul have escaped your attention. Also from so many Spanish provinces, which had long seemed to be untouched by these evils, such events have now begun to be reported. But why do we go so far? Look, in our region of Hippo, which the barbarians have not reached, the robberies committed by Donatist clerics and by the Circumcellions ravage the churches so that the actions of the barbarians perhaps seem less severe. For what barbarian could have thought up what these men did, namely, to throw lime and acid into the eyes of our clerics, whose other members they harmed with horrible blows

and wounds? They also plunder and burn some homes, carry off the grain, and pour out the wine and oil, and, by threatening others with such things, they force many also to be rebaptized. The day before I dictated these lines to you, it was reported to me that in one place forty-eight souls were rebaptized as a result of such acts of terror.

2. We ought to deplore these events, but not to be surprised, and we ought to cry out to God that he may free us from such great evils, not in accord with our merits but in accord with his mercy. For what else, of course, should the human race expect? After all, these evils were foretold both in the prophets and in the gospel so long before. We, therefore, ought not to be so inconsistent with ourselves that we believe when the scriptures are read and complain when they are fulfilled. Rather, even those who did not believe when they read or heard these events described in the holy books ought at least now to believe when they see them already fulfilled. In that way, just as the watery waste of unbelievers with their murmuring and blasphemy flows out under such great pressure, as though in the olive press of the Lord our God, so the oil of believers with their confessions and prayers will not cease to be squeezed out and purified. For it is easy to reply from the gospel to those who do not quiet down from hurling impious complaints against the Christian faith, saying that, before this teaching was proclaimed throughout the world, the human race did not suffer such great evils. After all, the Lord says, *A servant who does not know the will of his master and does actions that deserve a beating will receive a few blows, but the servant who knows the will of his master and does actions that deserve a beating will receive many blows* (Lk 12:48.47). Why, then, is it surprising if in the Christian era this world receives many blows like the servant who knows the will of his master and does actions that deserve a beating? People notice the great speed with which the gospel is proclaimed; they do not notice the great perversity with which it is rejected. The humble and holy servants of God, however, who suffer a double dose of temporal evils, because they suffer them both from the impious and with the impious, have their consolations and the hope of the world to come. For this reason the apostle says, *The sufferings of this time are not worthy of comparison with the glory to come that will be revealed in us* (Rom 8:18).

3. Hence, my very dear friend, you say that you cannot bear the words of those who say, "If we sinners merited these punishments, why are even the servants of God killed by the sword of the barbarians, and the handmaids of God taken captive?" Even to these, reply humbly, truthfully, and piously: "After all, however great may be the righteousness we observe, however great may be the obedience we offer to the Lord, can we be better than those three men who were thrown into the furnace of blazing fire in return for observing the law of God?" And yet, read what Azariah, one of the three, said there: *Opening his mouth in the midst of the fire, he said, "Blessed are you, Lord God of our fathers, and praiseworthy and glorious is your name forever, because you are just in all that*

*you did to us. All your works are true, and your ways right, and all your judgments are the truth. And you have made judgments in accord with the truth in all those evils that you have brought upon us and upon Jerusalem, the holy city of our fathers. For you have brought all these upon us in truth and judgment on account of our sins, because we sinned, did not obey your law, and did not observe your commandments in order that we might be well off. And you brought upon us all these things that you brought upon us by true judgment. And you have handed us over to the hands of the most hostile and wicked renegades and to an unjust king, the most evil one on the whole earth. And now it is not possible for us to open our mouth; truly we have been an embarrassment and insult to your servants and to those who worship you. Do not abandon us forever on account of your name, O Lord, and do not scorn your testament. Do not take away your mercy from us on account of Abraham, whom you loved, and on account of Isaac, your servant, and Israel, your holy man. You said to these men that you would multiply their offspring like the stars of the sky and like the sand of the sea. For we have become, Lord, the smallest of all the nations, and we are lowly today upon the earth on account of our sins” (Dn 3:25-37).* You certainly see, my brother, the sort of men they were, how holy and how brave in the midst of tribulation. When God, nonetheless, spared them, and the very flame did not dare to burn them, they confessed their sins for which they knew that they were deservedly and justly brought low, nor were they silent about it.

4. Can we, then, be even better than Daniel himself, of whom God says through the prophet Ezekiel to the prince of Tyre, *Are you wiser than Daniel?* (Ez 28:3). And he is one of the three righteous men, the only ones whom God says that he will set free, indicating by them, of course, three forms of righteous persons whom he says that he will set free in such a way that they will not set free their children with themselves, but that they alone will be set free, Noah, Daniel, and Job.<sup>1</sup> Read also the prayer of Daniel, and see how, when placed in captivity, he confesses, not the sins of the people alone, but also his own sins, and says that he has come to the punishment and insult of this captivity through the justice of God. For scripture says this: *And I turned my face to the Lord God in order to seek prayers and supplications in fasts and sackcloth, and I entreated the Lord my God, and I confessed and said, “Lord, great and wonderful God, you keep your testament and mercy toward those who love you and keep your commandments. We have sinned; we have acted against your law; we have acted wickedly. We have withdrawn and turned away from your commandments and from your judgments. We have not listened to your servants, the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings and to all the people of the earth. To you, Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us shame, just as today it belongs to the man of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to all of Israel, those who are near and those*

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1. See Ez 14:14 as well as Augustine, *Homilies on the Psalms* 132.



*who are far away on all the earth where you have scattered them on account of their rebellion because they rejected you, Lord. But shame belongs to us, to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, because we have sinned. To you, the Lord our God, belongs mercy and kindness, because we have turned away and have not listened to the voice of the Lord our God in order that we might abide by the commandments of this law, which he gave before our eyes into the hands of his servants, the prophets. And all of Israel sinned against your law and turned aside in order not to hear your voice, and there came upon us the curse and the oath that is recorded in the law of Moses, the servant of God, because we have sinned. And he has fulfilled his words that he spoke to us and to our judges who judged us that he would bring upon us great evils. Evils have never been done under heaven like those which have been done in Jerusalem. As it was written in the law of Moses, all these evils came upon us, and we did not ask the Lord our God to turn away from us our sins in order that we might understand all your truth. And the Lord God has watched over everyone of his holy ones and has brought those things which he did upon us, because the Lord our God is righteous in his whole world, which he made, and we have not listened to his voice. And now, O Lord our God, who led your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and made a name for yourself up to this day, we have committed sins against your law. O Lord, in all your mercy let your anger be turned aside and your wrath from your city, Jerusalem, and from your holy mountain. For on account of our sins and the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and your people have come to be an embarrassment for all who are around us. And now hear, our God, the pleas of your servant and his prayer, and show us your face toward your sanctuary, which is deserted. On your own account, Lord my God, give us your ear and listen; open your eyes and see our destruction and that of your city, Jerusalem, upon which your name is invoked. For we have not cast forth our petition in your sight because of our righteousness but because of your mercy, which is great. Hear, Lord; be merciful, Lord; pay attention, Lord, and do not be slow, my God, on your own account, because your name is invoked upon your city and your people." And I continued speaking and praying and enumerating my sins and the sins of my people (Dn 9:3-20). See how he mentioned his sins first and then those of his people. And he praises the righteousness of God, and he proclaims the praise of God because he scourges even his holy ones not unrighteously, but in accord with their sins. If these things are said by men who because of their outstanding holiness were unharmed by fires and lions around them, what ought we to say in our lowly state, who are so far from being their equals, however much righteousness we may seem to possess?*

5. But someone might think that those servants of God whom you say were killed by the barbarians ought to have escaped that sort of death, just as those three men were set free from the fires and just as Daniel was set free from the lions. Such persons should realize that God produced those miracles precisely in

order that the kings by whom the men were handed over to those punishments would believe that they worshiped the true God. For it was part of the hidden judgment and mercy of God that he should show concern in that way for the salvation of those kings. But he refused to show such concern for Antiochus, the king who slew the Maccabees with most cruel punishments,<sup>2</sup> but he punished the heart of the hard king with greater severity because of their most glorious sufferings. Read, nonetheless, what one of them, the sixth to suffer, said. It is recorded as follows: *And after this one they seized the sixth. And when, after having suffered these torments, he was about to die, he said, "Do not be misled on our account; we suffer these penalties because we sinned against our God, and we deserve these sufferings. But do not think that you will go unpunished, you who have chosen to fight against God and his law with your laws"* (2 Mc 7:18-19). You see how humbly and honestly these men thought; they admit that they are being scourged by the Lord for their sins. Of him scripture says, *The Lord rebukes the one he loves, but he chastises every son whom he recognizes* (Prv 3:12 and Heb 12:6). For this reason the apostle says, *For, if we judged ourselves, we would, of course, not be judged by the Lord. But since we are judged by the Lord, we are rebuked so that we may not be condemned with this world* (1 Cor 11:31).

6. Read these verses with faith; preach them with faith, and avoid as much as you can and teach others to avoid murmuring against God amid these temptations and tribulations. You say that good, faithful, and holy servants of God have been slain by the sword of the barbarians. But what difference does it make whether a fever or a sword has released them from the body? The Lord notes in his servants not the reason on account of which they come to him but the sort of persons who come to him. A long illness involves greater suffering than a very quick death, and yet we read of the long and horrible illness that Job suffered, though God himself, who cannot be deceived, certainly offered great testimony to his righteousness.<sup>3</sup>

7. That captivity of chaste and holy women is certainly very serious and highly deplorable, but their God is not a captive, nor has he abandoned his own captives if he knows his own. For those holy people whose sufferings and confessions I quoted from the holy scriptures, when they had been led off by the enemy and placed in captivity, said those words that we read from the scriptures in order that we might learn that their Lord does not abandon captive servants of God. But how do we know what miracles of his the almighty and merciful God may want to accomplish through them in the barbarian land? Only do not stop groaning on behalf of them before God, and do not cease to investigate, to the extent you can and he permits, for he gives the time and the ability, what has

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2. See 2 Mac 7:1.

3. See Job 1:8.

happened to them or what consolation you might provide for them. For a few years ago, a religious, a niece of Bishop Severus,<sup>4</sup> was taken from Sitifis<sup>5</sup> by the barbarians, and through the wondrous mercy of God she was returned to her parents with great honor. For that house of the barbarians that she entered as a captive suddenly began to be stricken by the illness of its masters so that all the barbarians, three or more brothers, if I am not mistaken, were suffering from a highly dangerous illness. Their mother noted that the girl was devoted to God and believed that by her prayers her sons could be set free from the danger of imminent death. She begged the girl to pray for them, promising that, if her sons were restored to health, they would return her to her parents. She fasted and prayed, and she was immediately heard. God, after all, did it for this purpose, as the outcome teaches. Thus, after they received back their health by the sudden gift of God, they were in awe of her and honored her, and they carried out what their mother had promised.

8. Pray, then, to God for them, and beg him also to teach them to say such prayers as the holy Azariah, whom we mentioned above, poured out to God among other things in his prayer and confession. For those women are in their land of captivity, just as those men were in that land where they could not offer sacrifice to the Lord in their usual way, just as these women cannot either bring an offering to the altar of God or find a priest there by whom they might offer sacrifice to God. May the Lord, therefore, grant to them that they may say to him what Azariah said in the following words of his prayers, *At this time we have neither prince nor prophet nor leader; we have neither holocausts nor offerings nor supplications nor a place for offering sacrifice in your sight to find mercy. But may we be found acceptable in a contrite soul and in a spirit of humility. Like the whole burnt offerings of goats and bulls and a multitude of fat lambs, so may our sacrifice be offered in your sight today in order to make perfect those who follow you, because those who place their trust in you will not be ashamed. And now we follow you with our whole heart and fear you, and we seek your face, Lord. Do not put us to shame, but deal with us according to your kindness and according to the multitude of your mercy. Set us free according to your marvelous works, and give glory to your name, Lord. And may all who threaten evil to your servants be afraid, and may they be put to shame by all your power. And may their might be worn down, and may they know that you are the Lord God alone and glorious in the whole world* (Dn 3:38-45).

9. God, who often helps his own people, will certainly help his own people as they say these prayers and groan to God, and he either will not permit their most chaste members to suffer anything from the lust of the enemy or, if he does permit this, when the mind is stained by no shameful consent, it also protects its

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4. Severus was the Catholic bishop of Milev in Numidia.

5. Sitifis was a city in Mauretania Sitifisensis.

flesh from sin. And whatever the carnal desire of the suffering woman neither committed nor permitted in the flesh will be the sin only of the man who does this. And all that violence suffered will not be regarded by God as a shameful loss of chastity but as the wound of martyrdom. For the integrity of chastity has such an influence in the mind that, as long as it is not violated, purity also cannot be violated in the body whose members could be forced into submission. May this letter, which is too short for your wishes, but very long, nonetheless, in relation to my busyness and hurried too much on account of the haste of the courier, suffice for Your Charity. The Lord will console you much more richly if you read his scripture with great attention.

## Letter 112

In 409 or 410 Augustine wrote to Donatus, formerly proconsul of Africa, a Catholic layman and landowner in Hippo and Siniti, Numidia. He expresses his esteem for Donatus (paragraph 1) and reminds him that his true worth lies not in popular opinion, but in the goodness of his actions, whether or not they are praised (paragraph 2). Finally, he urges Donatus to bring all his dependents into the Catholic communion (paragraph 3).

*To his excellent lord and brother worthy of the most sincere love, Donatus, Augustine sends greetings in the Lord.*

1. Though I desired it much, I could not see you when you were governor, even when you had come to Tibili. I believe that this happened in order that I might find more joy from your mind when it was free from public duties, for, if we had met when I was at leisure in your presence and you were busy, our meeting would not have satisfied the desire for either of us. Naturally, recalling the goodness of your character from the time when you came of age, I judge that your heart is abundantly suited for Christ to pour himself out into it most generously so that you may bear fruit for him that is more worthy of eternal and heavenly glory than of temporal and earthly renown.

2. For many people, in fact all whom I was able to ask or hear, as they also spontaneously praised you, exalt and laud the integrity and excellence of your governorship absolutely and constantly, and, without a worry from any dissonant voice, I received this praise with more certainty because they were unaware of our connection and because those who praised you were completely ignorant of whether I knew you even slightly. Otherwise, I might believe that they had wanted to charm my ears rather than to spread the truth about you. For praise is far removed from lying in a case where criticism also has no worry of giving offense. Nonetheless, O excellent brother, who are worthy of being honored with most sincere love, you do not now need to be taught, but perhaps to be reminded that all this glory and reputation among the people is a reason for joy, not because it is on the lips of the crowd, but because of the actions themselves. Even if these actions displease the crowd, they are precious because of their own brilliance and importance, not because of the approval of the uneducated. And we should pity someone who criticizes such actions rather than judge pitiful one who is criticized because of them. But when they are pleasing and are also celebrated by the people with the praise due to them, they do not in that way become greater and better because of the judgment of others, for they have their goodness from their inner reality and have their solid foundation in the strength of conscience alone. As a result, those human beings who judge correctly have

some reason for happiness rather than someone concerning whom the crowd judges favorably.

3. Since you know this perfectly well, my good friend, look, as you have begun, with the strongest gaze of the heart at our Lord Jesus Christ and, becoming completely free of all empty pride, rise up to him who does not raise up with vanity those who turn to him but places those who push on and ascend by the certain steps of faith at the everlasting summit of heavenly and angelic honor. By him I beseech you to write back to me and encourage in a friendly and kindly manner all your family whom you have in Siniti and in Hippo to come to the communion of the Catholic Church. I know that in her bosom you brought your praiseworthy and excellent father to birth, and I ask that you greet him for me with the respect due to his merits and do not delay to visit us. I also request this without impudence because you can carry out better in the eyes of God the business that you have here. May God's mercy embrace you and keep you from all evil.

## Letter 113

Sometime between 409 and 423 Augustine wrote this letter and the following on behalf of Faventius, who had sought asylum in the church of Hippo because of legal problems but became careless and was arrested and carried off. Augustine writes to Cresconius, a Catholic layman and tribune of the harbor at Hippo, asking him to intercede with the magistrate to allow Faventius the thirty-day period prescribed by imperial law to prepare his case and raise money while under moderate surveillance.

*To his most beloved lord and rightly honorable and praiseworthy brother, Cresconius, Augustine sends greetings in the Lord.*

If I turn a blind eye to this case concerning which, you see, I am again writing Your Eminence, not only Your Excellency, but also that man, whoever he is, because of whom Faventius<sup>1</sup> was seized in that manner, will deservedly blame me and rightly reprehend me. He will, of course, think that, if he himself had fled to the Church for help,<sup>2</sup> if something of the sort had happened to him, I would have turned a blind eye to his need and trouble. Moreover, if we should scorn the opinion of men, what shall I say to the Lord our God and what account shall I give him if I do not do as much as I can for the safety of one who entrusted himself for protection and help to the Church I serve, my most beloved lord and venerable son? I, therefore, beg Your Grace, since it is all but impossible and hard to believe that you either do not already know or cannot come to know the reason why he is being held, be so good in the meanwhile as to further my petition before the magistrate who is holding him in order that he may do what is prescribed by the emperor's law,<sup>3</sup> namely, that he should have him questioned in the municipal court whether he wants to be granted thirty days during which he might act under moderate surveillance in that city in which he is detained in order to prepare his case and to provide for his expenses. If, with the consent of Your Benevolence, we can in that period of time bring his case to an end through an amicable discussion, we shall have reason to rejoice. But if we cannot, he will face the decision of the courts that is pleasing to God in accord with the merits of the case itself or in accord with the will of the omnipotent Lord.

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1. Faventius was arrested by Florentinus, an officer of the count of Africa, despite his having sought asylum in the church of Hippo.
  2. The Christian churches enjoyed the right of asylum, as the pagan temples previously had.
  3. Augustine refers to the law issued by Honorius on 22 January 409, which allowed someone arrested to request thirty days in which to prepare his case and to put his affairs in order. See Letter 114 where Augustine spells out the details of the law.

## Letter 114

Shortly after the previous letter Augustine wrote to Florentinus, an imperial official. He asks Florentinus for help with the case of Faventius and appeals to the imperial law, a copy of which he enclosed with this letter.

*To his most beloved lord and son, Florentinus,<sup>1</sup> Augustine sends greetings in the Lord.*

It is up to you to see what authority gave the orders by which you seized Faventius. I, however, know this, namely, that all authority that is located under the imperial authority is subject to the laws of the emperor. Now, I sent to you by my brother and fellow priest, Coelestius, the text of the law of which you ought, of course, not to have been ignorant, even before I sent it. By that law it is permitted to those who are ordered by some authority to present themselves to the courts that they be brought before the municipal court and asked whether they want to spend thirty days under moderate surveillance in that city in which they are detained in order to prepare resources for themselves and set their case in order, as is needed. As the priest I mentioned reported to me, this law was read out for your revered self. I have, nonetheless, also now sent the same text along with this letter, not in order to threaten but in order to plead and to intercede for a human being in a human way and with the mercy of a bishop, to the extent that humaneness itself and piety permit. Be so good, my lord and son, as to add this to your reputation and grant my request, and do not hesitate to do on the occasion of my intervention and petition what the law of the emperor, whose country you serve, commands.

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1. Florentinus was an officer of the governor of Africa and a Catholic layman; he had Faventius arrested. See Letter 113.



## Letter 115

After the previous two letters Augustine wrote to Fortunatus, the bishop of Cirta in Numidia, explaining what happened to Faventius and asking that Fortunatus offer him help, especially in order that the imperial law might be observed that would allow Faventius thirty days to prepare his case and arrange for financial support.

*To his most blessed lord and venerable and most dear brother and fellow priest, Fortunatus, and to the brothers who are with you, Augustine sends greetings in the Lord.*

Your Holiness knows well Faventius, who was a manager of a country estate at Parati. Because he feared some sort of harm to himself from the proprietor of the estate, he fled to the church of Hippo, and he was there, as refugees often are, waiting to see how he might end his business problems through our intercession. As often happens, he became less and less worried each day and felt safe, as if then his opponent had ceased pursuing him, but when he emerged after dinner at his friend's, he was suddenly arrested by a certain Florentinus, an official of the governor, as is reported, with a band of armed men, as large as they thought sufficient for this purpose. When this was reported to me and when it was still unknown what man or men had taken him, though there was a suspicion about that man whom he feared and against whom he sought the protection of the church, I immediately sent word to the tribune who was appointed to guard the coast.<sup>1</sup> He sent officers, but no one could be found. But in the morning we learned the house in which he had been and also that after the break of dawn he left with the man who had detained him. I also sent someone to the place where he was said to have been taken. There the official I mentioned, once found, refused to allow the priest I sent even to see him. The next day I sent a letter, begging that he be granted what the emperor commanded in such cases, that is, that those who have been ordered to present themselves should be questioned by the municipal court whether they want to spend thirty days in that city under moderate guard in order to prepare their case and arrange for the expenses. I, of course, thought that during those days we could perhaps bring his case to an end by amicable discussion. However, he had already left, led off by that official. But the fear is that he might suffer some harm after having been led off to the office of the governor. For he has a case with a man of great wealth, though the integrity of the judge is well known because of his excellent reputation. In order that money may not prevail before the court, I beg Your Holiness, my most

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1. That is, Cresconius; see Letter 113.

beloved lord and venerable brother, that you be so good as to hand my letter to the governor, who is honorable and most dear to us, and read it to him, because I did not think it necessary to present the same case twice. And let him postpone the hearing of the case. For I do not know whether Faventius is guilty or innocent in this matter. Let him not disregard the fact that the laws were not observed in his regard, since he was arrested in such fashion and was not brought to the municipal court, as was commanded by the emperor, to be asked whether he wanted to receive the benefit of a postponement. In this way we can end this affair with his opponent.

## Letter 116

Along with the previous letter, Augustine wrote this letter to Generosus, the governor of Numidia, commending to his attention the case of Faventius and pleading that Generosus act as an honest and Christian judge.

*To his excellent and rightly illustrious lord and his honored and most dear son, Generosus, Augustine sends greetings in the Lord.*

Though the praise and exaltation of your administration and your glorious reputation has delighted me in accord with the love which we owe to your merits and your benevolence, I have never as yet been a burden to Your Excellency, my most beloved lord and venerable son, by my intercession to obtain some benefit. But now since Your Excellency knows what has happened in the city in which I serve the Church of God from the letter that I sent to my venerable brother and fellow bishop, Fortunatus,<sup>1</sup> Your Goodness will clearly see the necessity that has compelled me to add my petition to all the tasks with which you are occupied. And you will surely do what is fitting not only for an honest but also for a Christian judge with that attitude of mind toward us that we ought, of course, to count on in the name of Christ.

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1. See Letter 115.

## Letter 117

Perhaps in the beginning of 410, Dioscorus, a Greek by nationality, who was in Africa for studies, wrote to Augustine, sending him a list of questions on the philosophical works of Cicero and demanding a quick reply since he was about to set sail and did not want to appear ignorant and stupid in the eyes of others who might pose such questions to him. The letter lacks the usual salutation.

It would be not only superfluous, but also bothersome to write an introduction for you, since you desire actions, not words. And so, listen without further ado. The elderly Alypius,<sup>1</sup> when he was asked by me, often promised that he would along with you reply to a few little questions on the dialogues,<sup>2</sup> and because he is said to be in Mauretania today, I plead with all my strength and beg that you be so good as to reply alone, something which you were undoubtedly going to do, even if your brother were present. I am not asking for money or gold, though you undoubtedly would give that to anyone if you had it, but now without any great effort you can give me what I am asking of you. I could have pleaded with you more and through many of your friends, but I know your mind. You do not desire to be begged, but to give to all, provided only that there is nothing improper involved, and in this matter there is absolutely nothing improper. Nonetheless, whatever it is, I am about to set sail and I ask that you give it to me. You know how much I dislike to be a burden—I do not mean to Your Sincerity, but to anyone. God alone, however, knows how I did this, driven by great necessity. Having greeted you and with God's favor, I am about to set sail, and you are familiar with the behavior of human beings: They are inclined to be critical, and if someone is asked a question and does not reply, they will consider him unlearned and stupid. Therefore, I beg you, reply to all my questions without delay; do not let me go away sad. In that way I may see my parents, for I have sent Cerdo on this account alone, and I am waiting only for him. My brother, Zenobius, has become the director of the imperial chancellery<sup>3</sup> and sent us permission to travel along with provisions. If I am not worthy to have you reply to my little questions, at least show some respect for the provisions. May the supreme divinity keep you safe and sound for us for many years. The tutor greets Your Reverence.

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1. Alypius was Augustine's friend from his youth who was by this time bishop of Thagaste.
  2. Dioscorus refers to the philosophical dialogues of Cicero, such as *The Tusculan Disputations*, *The Republic*, *The Laws*, *The Nature of the Gods*, *Friendship*, and *Old Age*.
  3. The *magister memoriae*, translated here as "director," presided over the imperial chancellery and secretariat.

## Letter 118

Soon after receiving the previous letter, in late 410 or early 411, Augustine replied to Dioscorus with this letter, which lacks the usual salutation. He complains that Dioscorus has asked him to answer many difficult questions, though Augustine would prefer to rescue him from such curiosity (paragraph 1). Augustine admonishes Dioscorus about the impropriety of a bishop's neglecting the care of his church in order to answer questions on the dialogues of Cicero (paragraph 2). He further admonishes him because Dioscorus' chief concern is that he might appear ignorant and stupid if he is unable to answer questions about these dialogues (paragraph 3). He accuses Dioscorus of being motivated only by the desires for praise from others and for freedom from their criticism (paragraph 4) and of acting for a childish, useless, and vain goal (paragraph 5). He urges Dioscorus to work for a goal that is firm and unchanging (paragraph 6).

Perhaps Dioscorus wants to avoid the appearance of stupidity and ignorance in order to gain an entrance to the minds of others in order to help them to learn some beneficial and salutary knowledge (paragraphs 7 and 8). In any case Dioscorus is not likely to encounter the sort of questions about Cicero in the Eastern lands where he is headed (paragraph 9), where people are more likely to question him about the original Greek texts from which Cicero drew his philosophy (paragraph 10). Furthermore, it is more important to know the salutary truth that Dioscorus wants to teach than the means to attract listeners (paragraph 11). And if this salutary truth is the truth of the Christian faith, Dioscorus would do better to learn about the various heresies than about the ancient Greek philosophers (paragraph 12).

As Themistocles was not ashamed of not knowing how to play the flute, since he knew how to govern a state, so Dioscorus should not be ashamed of any ignorance of Cicero, since he knows how to attain the happy life, which consists in the possession of the highest good (paragraph 13). The highest good, Augustine argues, is not to be found in the body or in the soul, but only in immutable wisdom, the creator, and by clinging to him the soul attains happiness (paragraphs 14 and 15). The Platonists held that our supreme good will be the enjoyment of God, who made us and all things. Hence, they opposed the Stoics who located the highest good in the soul and the Epicureans who located it in the body (paragraph 16). But the Platonists were unable to become living examples of true reason as the others were living examples of their error, because the Platonists did not have the example of the humility of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and without that example they could not persuade the people about the truth they attained about morality (paragraph 17), about nature (paragraph 18), and about logic (paragraph 19).

Hence, the Platonists chose to conceal their views and argue against those who claimed to have discovered the truth, namely, the Stoics and the Epicureans (paragraph 20). Augustine claims to have demonstrated the errors of the pagans, especially in the Stoics and the Epicureans who have now fallen silent so that no new error arises without claiming for itself the Christian name (paragraph 21).

Augustine urges Dioscorus to take the way Christ provided for us: humility, humility, humility (paragraph 22).

To the humility of Christ there is opposed an ignorant knowledge that rejoices to know about the Greek philosophers in order to appear learned. In fact, the teachings of Christianity are quite sufficient. Augustine insists, for example, that Anaximenes' view that God was air should not be of concern to someone who knows that God is incorporeal (paragraph 23). So too, there is no need to quarrel with Anaxagoras over a word for saying that mind is truth or wisdom (paragraph 24). Augustine uses Cicero's comments on Anaxagoras to emphasize the difficulty of thinking of non-bodily realities (paragraph 25). For the Stoics and the Epicureans maintained that there are only bodily things, while Anaxagoras held that there is a pure and simple wisdom and truth, saw that it was God, and called it a mind (paragraph 26). Yet, we are not learned because of the knowledge of Anaxagoras, much less because of that of Democritus (paragraph 27).

Augustine points to the difference between Democritus and Epicurus on nature (paragraph 28) and expresses surprise that Democritus did not see the falsity of his view of mind from the images that enter it (paragraph 29). Cicero refutes the account Democritus and Epicurus give of the production of images by atoms flowing from bodies (paragraph 30). It is deplorable that such ideas cannot be immediately rejected once they are explained, but need to be refuted at length (paragraph 31). Because of the great blindness of human minds, Dioscorus should realize that our race could be helped in no better way than by the Truth becoming man to teach people who are incapable of understanding through wisdom that they should believe for their salvation (paragraph 32).

The Platonists who did not have such a divine person concealed their views then, but began to disclose what Plato held after the coming of Christ and his Church (paragraph 33). Finally, Augustine tells Dioscorus that he may have preferred other things in this letter, but that what he has written will do him more good. Some questions, however, he declines to answer since they are not suited to his calling as a bishop (paragraph 34).

1, 1. You thought that I should be suddenly besieged or rather overwhelmed by a horde of countless questions, as if you believed that I was unemployed and at leisure. After all, when could I in any amount of leisure resolve so many knotty problems for someone in such a rush and, as you write, already departing at the moment? For I would be prevented by the number of the questions, even if the problems were easy to resolve. But they are wrapped in such complexity and knotted with such tightness that, even if they were few and found me completely at leisure, they would weary my mind by the great amount of time they would take and would wear my finger to the bone. But I would like to snatch you from the midst of your delightful questioning and surround you with my worries in order that you might learn not to be uselessly curious or to impose the feeding and nurturing of your curiosity upon those who have it among their cares, or even

as their greatest care, to repress and to hold in check the curious. How much better, after all, how much more fruitful it would be if the time and effort spent in writing any letter to you were spent rather on trimming back your vain and deceitful desires! These are the more to be avoided the more they readily deceive, when veiled and covered by some shadow of morality and by the name of the liberal arts. How much better this would be than that our ministry and, so to speak, complicity should arouse more vehemently those desires so as to weigh down so fine a mind as yours.

2. Look, if all the dialogues<sup>1</sup> that you read have helped you in no way to see and grasp the end of all your actions, tell me, what good do they do you? For you clearly enough indicate by your letter where you locate the end of this whole most burning desire of yours, which is both fruitless for you and bothersome for us. For, when you were doing everything you could with me by letter concerning the solution of the questions which you sent me, you wrote as follows, "I could have," you said, "pleaded with you more and through many of your friends, but I know your mind. You do not desire to be begged, but to give to all, provided only that there is nothing improper involved, and in this matter there is absolutely nothing improper. Nevertheless, whatever it is, I am about to set sail and I ask that you give it to me."<sup>2</sup> In these words of your letter you are, of course, correct in thinking that I desire to give to everyone, provided that nothing improper is involved, but it is not evident to me that there is nothing improper involved in this matter. For my mind fails to find a proper appearance of things when I think that a bishop, torn this way and that by noisy concerns of the Church, holds himself back from all these, as if he suddenly became deaf, and explains minor questions about the Ciceronian dialogues to a single intellectual. Although, caught up in the ardor of your desire, you do not want to notice how improper this is, even you, nonetheless, see it. For what else does it indicate that, when you said that "in this matter there is absolutely nothing improper," you added immediately, "Nonetheless, whatever it is, I am about to set sail and I ask that you give it to me." For this sounds as though it seems to you, of course, that there is nothing improper in this matter, but whatever impropriety there is, you ask that I give it to you, who are about to set sail. But why is it that you added, "who am about to set sail"? Ought I not to give you anything if you were not going to set sail? You, of course, suppose that the sea water will wash away the impropriety. If that were the case, certainly my impropriety, for I am not about to set sail, would remain without being wiped away.

3. You also write that I know how much you dislike to be a burden to anyone, and you declare that God alone knows that you did this, driven by great necessity. When I read your letter, I, of course, applied my mind to know your neces-

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1. Augustine refers to the philosophical works of Cicero.

2. Letter 117.

sity when, look, you present me with the following, “You are familiar with the behavior of human beings: They are inclined to be critical, and if someone is asked a question and does not reply, they will consider him unlearned and stupid.” At this point I burned with the desire to reply to you, for with that malady of your mind you penetrated my heart and burst into my concerns so that I could not ignore healing you to the extent that the Lord might help. It was not that I had in mind resolving and explaining your questions; instead I wanted to tear your happiness—dependent, as it is, upon the tongues of human beings and fluctuating accordingly—away from so unfortunate a hawser and tie it to a site that was utterly unshakeable and stable. And you, O Dioscurus, do not notice your Persius, not mocking you with his clever verse but pummeling and twisting your boyish head, if you have any sense, with a fitting slap.

Your knowledge amounts to nothing  
Unless someone else knows that you know it.<sup>3</sup>

You have, as you said above, read so many dialogues; you have filled your heart with the arguments of so many philosophers. Tell me, which of them place the end of their actions in popular acclaim or in the tongues of human beings, even the good and the wise ones? But you—and this is something more shameful—on the verge of setting sail declare that you have made quite excellent progress in Africa, while you state that you are being a burden to bishops, men extremely busy and attending to other far different matters, in order to have them explain Cicero to you for no other reason than that you are afraid of people inclined to criticize, who might think that you are unlearned and stupid if they asked you a question and you could not reply! O what a task to keep bishops awake and worried over at night!

4. To me you seem to think of nothing else day and night but that you may be praised by human beings in your studies and learning. And what I judged to be something perilous for those whose goals are certain and correct, I, nonetheless, find, especially in your case. It is only because of that destruction that you have not, after all, seen the motive that could move us to give you what you asked. For you are wrongly caught up in learning those things that you are asking for only in order that you might be praised or not criticized by human beings, and you also just as wrongly think that we are moved by such reasons as you alleged in your request. And would that we could bring it about that you also would not be moved by so empty and fallacious a good as human praise when we indicate to you that we are not moved to give you what you ask for because you write this about yourself, but to correct you! “The behavior of human beings,” you say, “is inclined to criticize.” So what? “If someone is asked a question and does not reply, they will consider him unlearned and stupid.” Look, I am asking you a question not about the books

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3. Persius, *Satires (Saturnae)* 1, 27.



of Cicero, the meaning of which his readers perhaps cannot discover, but about your own letter and about the meaning of your words. For I ask why you did not say, "They will prove that one who does not reply is unlearned and stupid," but said rather, "They will consider him unlearned and stupid," unless you yourself understand well enough that someone who does not give such answers is not unlearned and stupid, but thought to be. But I warn you that someone who fears to be cut by the tongues of such thinkers, as if by scythes, is dry wood and, therefore, is not merely thought to be unlearned and stupid, but is truly so and proven to be so.

5. Perhaps you will say, "But since I am not dull-witted and I study precisely so that I may not be, I do not want even to be thought such." Good, but for what purpose do you not want this? That is what I ask. For you did not hesitate to be a burden to us in our resolving and explaining those questions, and you said that this reason and this purpose was so necessary that you called it a great necessity, namely, that human beings inclined to criticize would not consider you to be unlearned and stupid, when you are questioned about these matters and do not reply. I, however, ask whether this is the whole reason why you want this from us, or do you also want to avoid being thought unlearned and stupid for some other reason? If this is the whole reason, you see, I think, that this is the goal of this intense desire of yours, because of which you are also a burden to us, as you admit. But what from Dioscorus can be a burden for us except what weighs down Dioscorus even without his knowing it? He will not feel it unless he wants to rise up. And would that these burdens were not so tied on that he tries in vain to shake them from his shoulders! I do not say this because you are learning the answers to those questions, but because you are learning them for such a goal. For you surely see that this goal is childish, useless, and vain. It has a swelling under which a cancer also grows, and the pupil of the mind is blocked in order not to see the richness of the truth. Believe me, my Dioscorus; it is true. I pray that I may enjoy your friendship in the desire for the truth and in the dignity of the truth, by whose shadow you are turned away. For I find no way save this to convince you about this matter. After all, you do not see it, nor can you in any way see it as long as you pile up crumbling joys from the tongues of human beings.

6. If, however, the goal of these actions and of this desire is not found there, but you do not want to be thought unlearned and stupid for some other reason, I ask what it is. If it is so that you might have easier access for acquiring temporal riches, for winning a wife, for procuring honors and other such things, which rush away in a swift stream and carry those who have fallen into it to the bottom, it is not fitting for us to be of service to you for that purpose; in fact, it is fitting that we even turn you away from it. After all, we are not prohibiting you from locating the goal in the incertitude of fame so that you move from the Mincius to the Eridanus<sup>4</sup> in order that perhaps the Mincius might not soak you when you

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4. "Eridanus" is the classical name for the Po; the Mincius is a tributary of the Po.

move from it. For, since the vanity of human praise does not satisfy the hungry spirit because it offers nothing to eat except what is hollow and full of air, the hunger itself forces it to appeal to something else as richer and more fruitful. If this, nonetheless, is carried off by the flow of time, it is as if one river leads to another so that there is no end of misery as long as the goal of our duties is located in something unstable. We, therefore, want you to fix the abode of your utterly constant purpose and the most secure repose of all your good and honest actions in some firm and unchangeable good. Or if by a breeze of favorable popularity or even by opening the sails to the winds you could arrive at this earthly happiness, which I mentioned, do you think that you can refer this to another certain, true, and complete good? But it does not seem so to me, and the truth itself absolutely denies that such great wandering leads to the truth, which is so near, or that such great expenses are needed for the truth, which is so free.

7. Or do you think that you should use human praise as a means to prepare the entrance way to the minds of human beings for persuading them of what is true and salutary, and are you afraid that, when they think that you are unlearned and stupid they will think you someone unworthy for them to offer a very attentive or very patient hearing, whether you exhort someone to good deeds or upbraid the malice and wickedness of a sinner? If you were thinking of this goal of righteousness and beneficence in asking those questions, we have not been treated well by you. For you did not set forth in your letter the motive that might move us either to give gladly what you are asking for or not to give it on the grounds that some other cause perhaps prevented us. After all, it would be shameful not only to cater to your vain desire but even not to resist it. For how much better and more conducive to salvation would it be, I ask you, to accept the rules of the truth! How much more certain and brief it would be to accept by themselves those rules by which you could refute all those errors! Otherwise, and this is something false and shameful, you will think that you are learned and intelligent if you have learned those old, worn-out errors of many people with a more proud than prudent zeal. But now I do not think that you hold this. For we have not in vain stated so many truths to Dioscorus for so long a time since we began this letter.

2. 8. Hence, let us now see that other point, since you by no means judge yourself unlearned and stupid because of ignorance of these matters but rather because of ignorance of the truth. For, whoever has written or will write on these matters, either they are what you now hold with certitude, or you are safely ignorant of them if they are false. Then you will not waste away with worry about knowing the diversity of other views for fear that you remain as if unlearned and stupid. Since this, then, is the case, let us also see that issue, if you please. I mean whether the false judgment of others who, as you write, are inclined to criticize so that, if they perceive that you do not know these things, they will think, though falsely, that you are unlearned and stupid, ought to disturb you to the point that you act appropriately in asking bishops to explain

them to you. For we believe that you now desire these things with the goal of helping those people to convince them of the truth and to correct their lives. After all, if they think you unlearned and stupid regarding those books of Cicero, they will not consider you someone valuable from whom they think that they should learn for themselves any beneficial and salutary knowledge.

9. Believe me that is not the case, first, because I do not at all see that in those lands where you are afraid to be seen as unlearned and dull there are men who will ask you anything about these topics. For both here, where you came to learn these matters, and in Rome you experienced how lightly they are valued and, for this reason, are neither taught nor studied. And in Africa you suffer from no questioner on these matters to the point that you do not find anyone who will put up with you, and because of that dearth you are forced to send those questions to bishops for an explanation. You suppose that, even if these bishops, when young, took care to learn these matters as something important with the same ardor or rather error of mind by which you are carried off, they allowed them to remain in their memory until their episcopal heads were gray with age and while they sat upon their ecclesiastical seats. Or, if these men wanted them to remain, would not greater and more serious worries drive them from their hearts, even if they did not want that to happen, or if some of these things remained in their minds because of ingrained habit, would they not prefer to bury them in utter oblivion, when they come to mind, than to reply to foolish questions. For even in the superficiality of the schools and in the chairs of rhetoric they seem to have met with silence and lack of interest to the point that people think that such questions should be sent from Carthage to Hippo in order to be answered. But here they are so unusual and utterly foreign that, if I wanted to look at a text in my concern to reply, desiring to see how the author came from the previous statement to the one I am supposed to explain or how the argument continues from there, I could not in fact find the text of Cicero. If, however, those professors of rhetoric at Carthage were of no help in this study of yours, I not only do not blame them, but even give them my approval, if they perhaps recall that these debates were customarily held not in the forums of Rome but in the gymnasiums of Greece. But when you turned your thoughts to the gymnasiums and found them also bare as well and cold to such matters, the basilica of the Christians at Hippo occurred to you as the place to deposit your concerns, because there now sits in it a bishop who once sold such ideas to children. I, however, do not want you to be a child, and it is not proper that I hand out childish nonsense as I once sold it. Since this is so, that is, since two great cities, masters of Latin literature, Rome and Carthage, neither worry you with questions on these points nor care about your worries so they listen to your questions about them, I am amazed more than I can say that you, a young man with a fine mind, are afraid that in Greek and Eastern cities you will encounter any troublesome questioner on these matters. You will more readily hear horns in Africa than this sort of talk in those parts.

10. Second, suppose that I am wrong and that someone there asks such questions, someone more of a pest to the extent that in those places he is more inept. Would you not be afraid that once you, who have been trained in the Greek language from early on, found yourself in Greece, there would much more likely be Greeks there who might ask you some questions about the very books of the philosophers that Cicero did not quote in his writings? But if this happens, what are you going to answer? That you preferred to know these things in the books of Latin authors rather than in those of the Greeks? By that answer you will first of all offend Greece, and you know how those men do not tolerate this. Then, once they have been offended and angered, how quickly they will judge you stupid—precisely what you want to avoid in every way—because you preferred to learn the teachings of Greek philosophers or rather certain tiny pieces of their teachings torn from them and scattered about in Latin dialogues rather than to learn the whole of them in their proper setting in the Greek books of their own authors. How quickly they will also judge you unlearned because, though you do not know so many things in your own language, you have set out to gather crumbs of those same things in a foreign language. Will you perhaps answer that you have not scorned the Greek books on these topics, but took care to learn the Latin ones first, and that you want to study the Greek ones now that you are learned in the Latin books? If you, a Greek, are not ashamed to have learned the Latin works as a boy and now want to learn the Greek works as a man, will you be ashamed not to know some things in the Latin books that very many learned Latin speakers do not know along with you? Or are you aware of this from the very fact that you say that you are under such great necessity to be a burden to us because you find yourself at Carthage among so great a multitude of learned men?

11. Finally, suppose that you could reply, when questioned, on all those points about which you ask us. See, you will now be called very learned and very clever; see, a little Greek flattery already lifts you skyward with praises. Only remember your seriousness and the end for which you wanted to earn that praise, namely, in order that you might teach something very important and salutary to those people who are easily awed by trivia and hang upon your every word with much good will and great eagerness. I would like to know whether you possess and know how to hand on that very important and salutary something, whatever it is. For, when you learn many superfluous things precisely in order to prepare the ears of others for necessary things, it is ridiculous not to possess those necessary things, for the reception of which you prepared their ears by superfluous things. And, while you are busy learning how to make them attentive, it is ridiculous for you to refuse to learn what you should teach them once you have their attention. But if you say that you already know this and reply that it is the Christian teaching, for we know you prefer it to all others and that you are confident that it alone contains the hope of eternal salvation, it requires no knowledge of

Cicero's dialogues and of a collection of contradictory maxims begged from others in order to gain hearers. Let those who are going to receive from you such a teaching become attentive because of your moral conduct. I do not want you first to teach something that must be unlearned in order that you may teach the truth.

12. For if the knowledge of other dissident and contrary views in some way helps the teacher of the Christian truth to know how to destroy opposing errors, it helps at least so that anyone arguing in opposition does not set his eye only on refuting your views while he carefully hides his own. For the knowledge of the truth is able to detect all errors and to destroy them, even those that were previously unheard of, if they are only brought forth. But in order not only that those that are known might be combatted but also that those that are hidden might be uncovered, if there is need to know the errors of others, raise up your eyes and ears, I beg you, and see and hear whether anyone brings forth any objection against us from Anaximenes and Anaxagoras,<sup>5</sup> when not even the ashes of the much more recent and much more loquacious Stoics or Epicureans<sup>6</sup> are warm enough that a spark can be stirred from them against the Christian faith. But the noise of battle is heard here from the circles and assemblies, partly in flight, partly also boldly advancing, of the Donatists, Maximianists, and Manichees,<sup>7</sup> and also in the flocks and peoples to whom you are going, those of the Arians, Eunomians, Macedonians, Cataphrygians,<sup>8</sup> and the other plagues in countless numbers. If you are too lazy to learn the errors of all these, why does it fall to us to investigate what Anaximenes thought for the sake of the defense of the Christian religion and to rehash out of empty curiosity quarrels that have long since fallen asleep, while nothing is now said of the disagreements and questions of certain heretics, such as the Marcionites and Sabellians<sup>9</sup> and many others who glory in the Christian name. If, nonetheless, it is necessary, as I said, to know in advance and to have a thorough examination of some views opposed to the truth, we ought to give thought to the heretics who call themselves Christians rather than to Anaxagoras and Democritus.<sup>10</sup>

3, 13. Whoever he may be who asks of you the questions you ask of us, let him hear that you are more learned and more wise in your not knowing them. For

5. Two of the earliest Presocratic philosophers, Anaximenes and Anaximander, both of Miletus, flourished in the 6th century B.C.

6. The Stoics were founded by Zeno of Citium (ca. 362/357–264/259 B.C.); the Epicureans were founded by Epicurus of Athens (341–270 B.C.). Their followers were opposed to one another on many points, as Augustine points out.

7. On the Donatists, see *Heresies* 69; the Maximianists split away from the Donatists. For the Manichees, see *Heresies* 46.

8. Augustine mentions a series of Eastern heresies. For the Arians, see *Heresies* 49. For the Eunomians, see *Heresies* 54. For the Macedonians, see *Heresies* 52; for the Cataphrygians, see *Heresies* 26.

9. For the Sabellians and the Marcionites, see *Heresies* 41 and 22 respectively.

10. Democritus of Abdera (494–404 B.C.) was the leading atomist among the Greek philosophers.

Themistocles<sup>11</sup> did not care that he was considered rather ignorant when he refused to play the lyre at a banquet, and, when he said that he did not know how to do that, he was asked, "What, then, do you know?" He answered: "To make a great state out of a lesser one."<sup>12</sup> Should you, then, hesitate to say that you do not know these things, since you could reply to someone who asks what you know that you know how a human being can be happy even without these things? And if you do not yet have this knowledge, you are as misguided in seeking these other things as you would be misguided, when you are afflicted with some dangerous illness of the body, in seeking delicacies and finery rather than doctors and medicine. For you must by no means postpone this knowledge or prefer those other things to it, even in the order of learning, especially at this age. But see how easily you could know this if you wanted. For one who asks how to come to the happy life asks, of course, for nothing else but where the ultimate good is, that is, where the highest good of a human being resides, not according to a wrong or rash opinion but according to certain and unshakable truth. And no one finds any place where it resides except either in the body or in the soul or in God or in any two of them or surely in all of them. But if you have learned that neither the highest good nor some part of it is in the body, two possibilities remain: the soul and God, in one or two of which it might reside. If, however, you go on and learn that the same thing holds true of the soul as of the body, what else besides God comes to mind as that in which the highest good of a human being resides? It is not that other things are not good, but that is said to be the highest good to which the rest are ordered. Each is happy when enjoying that for the sake of which he wants to have all the other things, while that is now loved, not for the sake of something else, but for its own sake. And the end is said to be there, because one finds nowhere further to go or to be directed. There is rest from seeking; there is security in enjoying; there is the utterly tranquil joy of a complete good will.

14. Give me, then, someone who is quick to see that the body is not the good of the soul but that the soul, rather, is the good of the body. He will immediately cease from asking whether that highest good or some part of it is in the body. For it is most foolish to deny that the soul is better than the body. It is likewise most foolish to deny that what gives the happy life or some part of the happy life is better than what receives it. The soul, therefore, does not receive from the body either the highest good or some part of the highest good. Those who do not see this are blinded by the sweetness of carnal pleasures, which they do not see comes from the lack of good health. But the perfect health of the body is that final immortality of the whole human being. For God made the soul with so

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11. Themistocles (524-460 B.C.) was an Athenian politician who saved Greece from subjection to the Persian empire at the Battle of Salamis.

12. See Plutarch, *Themistocles* 2, and Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* (*Tusculanae disputationes*) 1, 2, 4.

powerful a nature that from its full happiness, which is promised to the saints in the end of time, there will also overflow into the inferior nature, that is, into the body, not the happiness that is proper to one who enjoys and understands, but the fullness of health, that is, the strength of incorruptibility. Those who do not see this, as I said, fight with restless quarrels, each one locating, according to his grasp, the highest good of human beings in the body, and they stir up the masses of carnal and rebellious people. Among these the Epicureans<sup>13</sup> enjoyed a more excellent authority in the eyes of the unlearned multitude.

15. Likewise give me someone who is quick to see that, when it is happy, the soul itself is not happy because of its own good; otherwise, it would never be unhappy, and it would cease from asking whether that highest and, so to speak, beatifying good or some part of it is in the soul. For, when the soul rejoices in itself, because of itself, as if then because of its own good, it is proud. But when it sees that it is changeable, at least because of this one fact, namely, that it becomes wise from foolish, and when it sees that wisdom is immutable, it ought at the same time to see that wisdom is above its own nature and that the soul more richly and more certainly rejoices because of partaking of it and because of being illumined by it than because of itself. Ceasing in that way and subsiding from its own boasting and inflatedness, it strives to cling to God and to be re-created and re-formed by that immutable being, from whom it already grasps that there comes not only every form of all the things that are attained either by the senses of the body or by the intelligence of the mind, but also that very capacity for formation before it is formed, when it is said to be something unformed that can be formed. In that way the soul perceives that it is less stable to the extent that it clings less to God, who exists in the highest way, and that he exists in the highest way because he neither makes progress nor fails because of any mutability. The soul perceives, however, that it profits from that change by which it makes progress so that it clings to God perfectly and that the change that consists in its failing is full of defects. But every defect tends toward destruction, and even if it is not clear that a particular thing comes to destruction it is, nonetheless, clear to everyone that destruction brings it to the point that it is no longer what it was. Hence, the soul concludes that things fail or can fail for no other reason than that they were made out of nothing and that the fact that they are and last and are ordered toward the harmony of the universe in accord with their defects pertains to the goodness and omnipotence of him who exists in the highest way, the creator, who is able to produce not only something out of nothing but even something great out of nothing. But the first sin, that is, the first voluntary defect, is to rejoice over one's own power, for in this case one rejoices over something smaller than if one rejoiced over God's power, which is, of course, greater.

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13. The followers of Epicurus were thought to have located the highest good in pleasures, especially those of the body.

Those who do not see this and who look upon the powers of the human soul and the great beauty of its words and deeds and who locate the highest good in the human soul, though they were ashamed to locate it in the body, have certainly located it lower than where it ought to be located by reason at its clearest. Among the Greek philosophers who think this way, the Stoics have predominated in number and in the subtlety of argument, but because they think that everything in the natural world is bodily, they were better able to turn the soul away from the flesh than from the body.

16. Among those who say that our one and supreme good will be to enjoy the God by whom both we and all things have been made, the Platonists<sup>14</sup> were preeminent among them. With good reason they thought that it was their duty to resist the Stoics and Epicureans chiefly and almost exclusively. The Academics are, of course, the same as the Platonists, as the very sequence of disciples teaches us. For Arcesilas<sup>15</sup> was the first who, having concealed his own opinion, decided to do nothing but refute those people. Ask whose place he took, and you will find Polemon; ask whose place he took, and you will find Xenocrates.<sup>16</sup> But Plato left his school, the Academy, to his disciple, Xenocrates. Insofar, then, as it pertains to the highest good of human beings, remove the individual human beings and consider the argument itself. You will find, of course, that the two errors collide with each other head-on, one that locates the highest good in the body, the other that locates it in the soul. But the nature of the truth, by which God is understood to be our highest good, resists both of these, not teaching the truth, however, before it refutes their errors. Consider the argument again with the individual persons included, and you will find that the Epicureans and the Stoics are fighting bitterly with each other, but that the Platonists, while trying to settle the argument between those two, still conceal their own views while accusing and refuting the vain confidence in error on the part of the others.

17. But the Platonists were not able to become the living example of true reason as those other philosophers were able to become living examples of their errors. For they were all lacking the example of divine humility, which was revealed at the most opportune moment by our Lord Jesus Christ. Before that one example all pride yields, is broken, and dies in the mind of anyone, no matter how terribly arrogant. And so the Platonists were unable by their authority to bring the masses blinded by a love of earthly things to a faith in invisible things. For they saw that the masses were moved, especially by the Epicurean arguments, not only to experience bodily pleasure, which they willingly pursued, but

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14. The term "Platonists" refers to all the followers of Plato, though for Augustine the principal Platonists were Plotinus (204/205-270 A.D.) and Porphyry, his student, who organized Plotinus' teachings in the *Enneads*.

15. Arcesilas of Pitane (ca. 315-241 B.C.) is regarded as having founded the New Academy.

16. Polemon of Athens was converted to philosophy by Xenocrates whom he followed as head of the Academy from 314 to 270 B.C.



even to defend it to the point that they located in it the highest good of a human being. But they saw that those who were roused against this pleasure by the praise of virtue contemplated it with less difficulty in the soul of human beings, from which there proceed good deeds, about which they were somehow able to judge. At the same time they saw that, if they tried to teach them about some reality that was divine and immutable above all things and that was attained by no bodily sense, but understood by the mind alone, a reality that, nonetheless, surpasses the nature of the mind, the people would not understand. If they tried to teach them that this reality is God, who is promised for the enjoyment of the human mind that has been purified from every stain of human desires, in whom alone all our longing for happiness would come to rest, and in whom alone we would have the attainment of all goods, the people would not understand and would ascribe victory to the Epicureans or to the Stoics, their opponents, much more readily than to the Platonists. Therefore, the true and salutary teaching would become scorned by the mockery of peoples, something that is most harmful for the human race. And this holds for morality.

18. But on questions about nature the Platonists said that incorporeal wisdom is the creator of all natures, while those others never moved away from bodies, since some assigned the principles of things to atoms and others to the four elements, among which fire was the most important for making all things. Hence, who would not see which side the multitude of the foolish, who are completely given over to bodies, would be most drawn to support, since they cannot see the incorporeal power that is the creator of things?

19. There remained the part with questions on logic. For you know that whatever is sought in order to acquire wisdom poses a question either about morals, or about the natural world, or about reason. Since, then, the Epicureans said that the bodily senses are never deceived, while the Stoics admitted that they are deceived at times, though they both, nonetheless, placed the criterion of grasping the truth in the senses, who would listen to the Platonists, given the opposition of these philosophers? Who would think that they should be included not only in the number of the wise but in that of human beings at all, if they said right off that there is not only something that can be perceived neither by the touch of the body nor by smell or taste, nor by these ears or eyes, and is not thought of at all by some imagining of the sort of things that are sensed in that way, but that it alone truly exists and it alone can be perceived? For it is immutable and everlasting but perceived by the intelligence alone, by which the one truth is attained, however it is attained.

20. Since the Platonists, then, held such views which they would not teach to human beings completely given over to the flesh, and since they did not enjoy such great authority among the people that they persuaded them to believe such things, they chose to conceal their view until the mind was raised to that disposition by which these things are grasped. And they chose to argue against those

who boasted that they had discovered the truth, though they located the discovery of the truth in the bodily senses. And how is it relevant to examine what their plan was? It certainly was not divine or endowed with divine authority. Consider only the fact that Cicero most clearly shows in many ways that Plato located the highest good and the causes of things and the trustworthiness of reason in wisdom, not human wisdom but clearly the divine wisdom by which human wisdom is kindled, that is, in wisdom that is absolutely immutable and in the truth that is always the same.<sup>17</sup> Consider too that the Platonists attacked in the name of the Epicureans and Stoics those who located the highest good, the causes of things, and the trustworthiness of reason in the nature of the body or of the mind. Consider that in the course of time the situation came to the point that, at the beginning of the Christian era, faith in invisible and eternal realities was proclaimed through visible miracles for their salvation to human beings, although they could neither see nor think of anything besides bodies. And consider that these very same Epicureans and Stoics are found to have in the Acts of the Apostles opposed the blessed apostle Paul who was spreading that same faith among the nations.<sup>18</sup>

21. In this argument it seems to me that I have demonstrated sufficiently the errors of the pagans, whether on morals or on the nature of reality or on the method of investigating the truth. Though these errors were many and varied, they stood forth, nonetheless, principally in these two sects and, despite the attacks of the learned who were overthrowing them with such a great subtlety and abundant argument, they lasted, nonetheless, even into the Christian era. We see that now at least in our age they have fallen silent so that in the schools of rhetoric it is now hardly so much as mentioned what their views were. The debates, nonetheless, have been eradicated and removed even from the most garrulous gymnasiums of the Greeks so that, if any erroneous sect now emerged in opposition to the truth, that is, in opposition to the Church of Christ, it would not dare to step forth for battle if it were not clothed with the Christian name. From this it is understood that those philosophers of the Platonic school, having changed a few things of which Christian discipline disapproves, ought to bow their pious necks to the one king, Christ, and to understand that when he, the Word of God clothed with a man, commanded faith, the people believed what the Platonists were afraid even to state.

22. I wish, my Dioscorus, that you would be subject to him in complete piety and would not construct another way to reach and to gain the truth than that way which he constructed who, as God, saw the weakness of our steps. That first way, however, is humility; the second way is humility, and the third way is humility, and as often as you ask, I would say this. It is not that there are no other

17. See Cicero, *The Ends of the Good and the Evil (De finibus bonorum et malorum)* V, 15, 43.

18. See Acts 17:18.

commandments that should be mentioned, but unless humility precedes and accompanies and follows upon all our good actions and is set before us to gaze upon, set alongside for us to cling to, and set over us to crush us down, pride tears the whole benefit from our hand when we rejoice over some good deed. We must fear the other vices in sinful actions, but pride even in good deeds. Otherwise we will lose, because of the desire for praise, those things that were done in a praiseworthy manner. And so, when that most distinguished orator was asked what he thought one ought first of all to observe in the rules of eloquence, he is said to have answered, "Delivery." And when he was asked what came second, he said again, "Delivery." And asked what came third, he said only, "Delivery."<sup>19</sup> So too, if you ask and as often as you ask about the rules of the Christian religion, I would answer only, "Humility," even if necessity would perhaps force me to say something else.

4. 23. Our Lord Jesus Christ humbled himself in order to teach us this most salutary humility. To this humility, I say, there is strongly opposed a certain most ignorant knowledge, so to speak, when we rejoice that we know what Anaximenes, what Anaxagoras, what Pythagoras,<sup>20</sup> and what Democritus held and other things like this in order that we may appear learned and educated, though this is far distant from true learning and education. After all, one who has learned that God is not extended or spread out in places, whether finite or infinite, as if he were larger in one part and smaller in another, but is present as whole everywhere, like the truth, of which no one sensibly says that a part is in this place and a part is in that place, for the truth is, of course, God, will in no way be disturbed about what he thought about the infinite air, whoever thought that it was God. What difference does it make to him if he does not know what these men say is the form of the body—they, of course, say that it is that which is limited on all sides—and whether for the sake of refutation Cicero, like an Academic, objected to Anaximenes that God must have form and beauty like bodily beauty, thinking that Anaximenes had said that God was bodily?<sup>21</sup> For air is a body. Or did he hold that the truth has an incorporeal beauty by which the mind is informed and by which we judge that all the actions of a wise person are beautiful so that Cicero said not merely for the sake of refutation, but also with complete truth, that it is right that God have a most beautiful appearance, because nothing is more beautiful than intelligible and immutable truth? But the fact that Anaximenes said that air, which he, nonetheless, thought was God, is generated does not in any way bother a man who understands that the Word of God, God with God, was not generated in the way in which air is generated, that

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19. See Cicero, *The Orator (De oratore)* III, 56, 213, where he reports that Demosthenes said that acting was of such importance for the orator.

20. Pythagoras of Samos flourished in the middle of the 6th century before Christ; he is best known for his doctrine of the transmigration of souls.

21. See Cicero, *The Nature of the Gods (De natura deorum)* I, 26.

is, caused to be by some cause, but in a far different way, which no one will understand except one whom God himself inspires. But who would not see that Anaximenes is unwise even regarding bodies themselves, since he says that air is generated and wants it to be God, but says that the source from which air is generated—for it cannot be generated from nothing—is not God? But when he says that air is always in motion, he will in no way confuse someone so that he thinks it is God, if he knows that the motion of every body is inferior to the motion of the soul, but that the motion of the soul is far more sluggish than the motion of the highest and immutable truth.

24. Likewise, if Anaxagoras or anyone says that mind is the truth and wisdom,<sup>22</sup> why should I quarrel with the man over a word? It is, after all, evident that it produces the arrangement and measure of all things and that it is not incongruously said to be endless, not in space, but in its power, which human thought cannot comprehend. Nor does it follow that this wisdom is something formless, for this characteristic pertains to bodies, namely, that whichever bodies are without limit are also formless. But in his desire, it seems, to refute his adversaries who thought only of bodily things, Cicero denies that anything can be joined to something unlimited, because in bodies on that side on which anything is joined to something there must be some limit. Hence, he says that he also did not see that “there cannot be any motion united with sensation or connected,” that is, clinging with a continuous union, “to the infinite,”<sup>23</sup> that is, to some unlimited thing, as if he were dealing with bodies, to which nothing can be united except through spatial limits. But he added as follows, “Nor can there be any sensation at all without the whole of nature sensing the repercussion,”<sup>24</sup> as if Anaxagoras had said that the mind, which orders and governs all things, had sensation like that which the soul has through the body. For it is evident that the whole soul senses when it senses something through the body. After all, the whole soul is aware of whatever it is that is sensed. But Cicero said that the whole of nature senses precisely to deprive Anaxagoras, as it were, of his claim that mind is without limit. For how does the whole mind sense if it is without limit? After all, bodily sensation begins from some place, and it does not run through the whole except of that thing to whose end it comes, and that thing cannot be called endless. But Anaxagoras had not spoken about bodily sensation, and an incorporeal whole is spoken of in another way, because it is understood to be without limits in space so that it can be said to be both whole and endless: whole because of its entirety and endless because it is not circumscribed by spatial limits.

22. Anaxagoras held that there is an infinite mind (*νοῦς*) that has power over all things. Augustine draws his information on Anaxagoras from the previously mentioned passage of Cicero's work.

23. Cicero, *The Nature of the Gods* (*De natura deorum*) I, 26.

24. *Ibid.*

25. "Then," he says, "if he intended this mind to be like some living being, there will be something interior because of which it will be called a living being,"<sup>25</sup> so that this mind is like a body and has within it a soul, because of which it is called a living being. See how he speaks out of the habit of dealing with bodies, in the way in which living beings are often viewed, on account of the obtuseness, I think, of those against whom he is speaking, and he, nonetheless, mentioned something that, if they were alert, would have sufficiently warned them, namely, that everything like a living body that comes to mind must be thought to have a soul and is a living being rather than a soul. For this is what he says, "There will be something interior because of which it is called a living being." But he adds, "What is more interior than the mind?"<sup>26</sup> A mind, therefore, cannot have an interior soul so that it is a living being because it is itself interior. Hence, it has a body outside in relation to which it is interior in order that there may be a living being. For this is what he says, "It is, therefore, clothed with a body externally,"<sup>27</sup> as if Anaxagoras said that a mind could not exist unless it belonged to some living being. It could be that Cicero held that the mind was itself the highest wisdom, which does not properly belong, so to speak, to any living being, because the truth offers herself in common to all souls who are able to enjoy her. And for this reason see how acutely he concludes: "And since this is not acceptable," that is, it is not acceptable to Anaxagoras that the mind, which he calls God, is clothed with a body externally by reason of which it can be a living being, "a pure and simple mind without anything united to it by which it could have sensation," that is, without any body united to it by which it could have sensation, "seems to escape the power and grasp of our intelligence."<sup>28</sup>

26. There is nothing more true than that this escapes the power and grasp of the intelligence of the Stoics and Epicureans who can only think of bodily things. But when he said, "our," he wanted us to understand, "human," and he rightly did not say, "escapes," but, "seems to escape." For it seems to them that no one can understand this, and for this reason they think that there is nothing of the sort, but it does not escape the intelligence of certain persons, to the extent that this is granted to human beings, that there is a pure and simple wisdom and truth, which is not proper to any living being but by which every soul that is capable of this is in common made wise and true. And if Anaxagoras held that it exists and saw that it is God and called it mind, we are not made learned and wise by the name of Anaxagoras, which all the little masters happily trumpet about, if I may use military language. We are not made learned and wise even by that knowledge of his by which he knew that it is true. After all, truth ought not to be dear to me because Anaxagoras knew it but because it is the truth, even if none of those philosophers knew it.

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25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*, 27.

27. If, then, neither the knowledge of that man, who perhaps saw the truth, nor the full reality of the truth, which can make us truly learned, ought to fill us with pride so that we think that we are learned because of it, how much less can the names and teachings of those men who were in error help our learning and make hidden matters known! For, if we are human beings, it is proper that we be saddened by the errors of so many and such illustrious men, if we happen to hear them, rather than that we eagerly seek them out precisely in order to spout them with most hollow boasting among those who are ignorant of them. After all, how much better it would have been had I never heard the name of Democritus instead of thinking that he was someone considered great in his times. He thought that the gods were images that flowed from solid bodies, though the images were not themselves solid, and that, by going about this way and that by their own motion and by slipping into the minds of human beings, they make them think of the divine power, even though that body, of course, from which the image flows is thought to be more excellent to the extent that it is more solid! Hence his opinion was wavering, as they say, and in doubt so that at times he said that God was a certain nature from which the images flowed. And yet God could not be thought of save by means of those images which he pours out and emits, that is, which emerge from that nature, which Democritus considers to be somehow bodily and everlasting and, for that reason, also divine. They are carried in a continuous semblance and emanation as if of vapor, and they come and enter our minds so that we can think of God or of the gods. For these people conceive no other cause of any thought of ours except that images come and enter our minds from these bodies we think of, as if those who know how to think of such things do not think of many and almost countless things, such as wisdom itself and truth, in a non-bodily and intelligible way. If they do not think of this, I wonder how they argue about it at all, but if they do think of it, I wish they would tell me either from which body the image of truth comes into their minds or what sort of image it is.

28. And yet Democritus is also said to differ from Epicurus on questions about nature by the fact that he thought that there is present in the coming together of the atoms a certain animal and vital force, and I believe that he says that "the images are endowed with divinity" by that force—not the images of all things, but those of the gods—and that in the universe there are "the elements of mind," to which he attributes divinity, and "living images, which often either benefit us or harm us."<sup>29</sup> But Epicurus does not maintain anything in the elements of things besides atoms, that is, certain bodies so small that they cannot be divided or perceived by sight or by touch. And he says that the fortuitous coming together of these tiny bodies produces countless worlds, living beings, souls themselves, and the gods, which he locates not in some world, but outside the worlds and between the worlds in human form. And he absolutely refuses to think of anything besides bodies. He says, none-

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29. *Ibid.*, 120.

theless, that in order to think of them, images flow from the things, which he thinks are formed from atoms, and they enter the mind as more subtle than those images that come to the eyes. For he says that the cause of our seeing is "certain images so large that they embrace the whole external world."<sup>30</sup> But you already understand, I think, the images that these people have in mind.

29. I am surprised that Democritus did not notice that what he says is false by the very fact that such great images coming into our mind, which is so small, cannot wholly touch it, if the bodily mind, as they claim, is enclosed in so small a body. For, when a small body is touched by a large body, it can by no means be touched by the whole large body at the same time. How, then, are those images thought of as whole at the same time, if they are thought of to the extent that they touch the soul by coming and entering it? For they can neither as whole enter through so small a body nor as whole touch so small a soul. Remember that I am saying this in accord with their way of thinking, for I do not think that the mind is that sort of thing. Or, if Democritus thinks that the mind is incorporeal, only Epicurus can be refuted by this argument. But why did Democritus not also see that there is no need, nor is there any possibility, that an incorporeal mind think as the result of the arrival of bodily images and contact with them? Both of them are certainly refuted from the vision of the eyes. For such enormous bodies of these images can in no way as whole touch such small eyes.

30. But when they are asked why we see one image of some body from which images flow in countless number, they reply that, because of the fact that images flow forth frequently and intersect, their accumulation and density brings it about that one image is seen from the many. Cicero refutes this nonsense in such a way that he denies that their God can be thought to be eternal by the very fact that he is thought of as the result of countless images that flow forth and slip away. And they say that the everlasting forms of the gods are produced by the help of countless atoms, since certain tiny bodies leave the divine body so that others take their place and do not allow that nature to be destroyed by their succession. He says, "All things would be eternal,"<sup>31</sup> because nothing lacks this countless number of atoms that would make up for the constant loss of them. Later, he asks how this god would not fear that he would perish "since he is struck incessantly and disturbed by the endless influx of atoms."<sup>32</sup> He says that this body is struck because it is beaten by the incoming rush of atoms and is disturbed because it is penetrated by them. Then he adds, "Since the images," about which we have already said enough, "are always flowing into him,"<sup>33</sup> how can he be confident of his immortality?

31. Among all these crazy ideas of those who think this way, it is especially deplorable that it is not enough to explain them in order for them to be rejected

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30. *Ibid.*

31. *Ibid.*, 109 and 105.

32. *Ibid.*, 114.

33. *Ibid.*

without any argument to the contrary from anyone. But the minds of very intelligent men have also taken up this task of extensively refuting these ideas that even the slowest minds ought to have mocked and rejected as soon as they were stated. For, if you grant that there are atoms, if you also grant that they push and shove one another by their fortuitous coming together, is it also allowed to grant that, in colliding fortuitously, atoms produce something so that they limit it with form, determine it with shape, adorn it with equality, brighten it with color, and enliven it with soul? For all these things are produced only by the art of divine providence. Anyone who loves to see with the mind rather than with the eyes and asks for this from the God who made him sees this truth. For one should not grant in any way that those atoms exist; see how easily this can be shown in accord with the opinion of these philosophers, even if one leaves aside the subtle arguments that the learned pass on concerning the division of bodies. The learned, of course, say that all the things that belong to nature are nothing other than bodies, the void, and accidents of them, and I believe this means motion, thrust, and the resulting forms. Let them say, then, in which kind they put the less solid images themselves, which they think emanate from more solid bodies so that they can only be perceived by contact with the eyes when we see and with the mind when we think, if these images themselves are also bodies. For they think in that way that they can leave a body and come to the eyes or to the mind, which they nonetheless say is bodily. I ask whether the images flow forth from the atoms themselves. If they do, how can they be atoms, if some bodies split off from them? If they do not, either something can be thought of without images—an idea which they strongly reject—or how do they know about atoms, which they cannot even think of? I, however, am now embarrassed to refute these ideas, though they were not embarrassed to hold them. But since they have dared to defend them, I am embarrassed not over them but over the human race, whose ears were able to tolerate them.

5. 32. Since, then, there exists such a great blindness of minds because of the filth of sin and the love of the flesh that even these monstrous views could consume the leisure of the learned in arguments, will you, Dioscurus, or anyone endowed with a mind that is alert, doubt that for following the truth the human race could not have been helped better in any way than if the Truth himself assumed in an ineffable and wondrous way a man who bore his person on earth? By commanding what was right and by doing the works of God, he persuaded people to believe for their salvation what they could not yet understand through wisdom. We ourselves serve his glory; we urge you to believe without wavering and with constancy this man through whom it has come about that not a few but even whole peoples who are unable to settle these questions by reason believe<sup>34</sup> with faith until, aided by his saving precepts, they emerge from these perplexi-

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34. I have translated "*credant*," which is found in the older editions, rather than "*inrideant*," which is found in the CSEL text.



ties into the brightness of the most pure and most sincere truth. And we ought to obey this authority with greater devotion to the extent that we see that no error dares to raise its head to gather to itself crowds of uneducated people without seeking to cloak itself with the Christian name. From the old peoples, however, only those people continue apart from the name of Christ and gather somewhat more frequently in their synagogues who possess those scriptures by which the Lord Jesus Christ was foretold, though they pretend that they do not understand and see this. But those people who are not in the unity of the Catholic community, though they boast of the Christian name, are forced to be opposed to those who believe, and they dare to attract the uneducated by the semblance of reason, especially when the Lord came with this medicine that was precisely to demand faith. But these heretics are forced to do this, as I said, because they see that they have no standing whatsoever, if their authority is compared with the Catholic authority. They try, therefore, to overcome the most stable authority of the most well-founded Church as if by the mention and promise of reason. This rashness is like a general rule for all heretics. But that most merciful sovereign of our faith has both fortified the Church with a fortress of authority through crowded communities of peoples and nations and the very sees of the apostles and armed the Church with abundant means of defense by invincible reason through a smaller number of learned and truly spiritual men. This, then, is the most correct practice: to receive the weak as much as possible into the fortress of faith in order to fight the battle on their behalf by the strength of reason, once they have been placed in safety.

33. But the Platonists, who were at that time surrounded by the yapping errors of the false philosophers, did not have a divine person by whom they might demand faith. Hence they preferred to conceal their view as something to be sought out rather than to expose it to profanation. But when the name of Christ had become more frequently heard to the wonder and confusion of earthly kingdoms, they began to come forth to disclose and explain what Plato had held. Then the school of Plotinus flourished in Rome and had as disciples many very keen and clever men. But some of them were corrupted by curiosity concerning the arts of magic, while others, knowing that the Lord Jesus Christ bore the person of the immutable truth and wisdom, which they were trying to attain, entered into his army. And so the whole summit of authority and the light of reason for the re-creating and re-forming of the human race was located in that one saving name and in his own Church.

34. Though you perhaps would have preferred other things, I do not regret having stated these ideas for you at such great length in this letter. For you will appreciate these ideas more to the extent that you make progress in the truth, and then you will appreciate my advice, which you now think has contributed less to the good of your studies. And yet I also tried to reply, as well as I could, to those

very questions of yours, not only to certain ones in this letter, but also to almost all the rest, by making brief notes on the very pages on which you sent them. If you think that with these questions I have done too little or something other than you wanted, you are not thinking correctly, my Dioscorus, about the one whom you are now asking these questions. But I have passed over all the questions about *The Orator* or from the books of *The Orator*. For I would have seemed a trifler in my own eyes if I had gone on to explain them. Concerning the others I could, after all, be appropriately questioned if anyone presented me with the issues to be examined and resolved not from the books of Cicero but by themselves. But in those books the issues are less suited to our calling as a bishop. I would not, however, have done all this if I had not withdrawn for a while from Hippo after the illness that I had when your man had come to me. During these days I was again stricken with problems of health and fevers. Hence, the result is that this letter is being sent to you later than it could have been. I ask that you let me know how you find it.

## Letter 119

In 410 Consentius, a Catholic layman from the Balearic Islands, wrote to Augustine about various theological questions. Consentius announces his conviction that the truth is to be sought from faith rather than reason (paragraph 1). He then pleads with Augustine to help him to penetrate the divine mysteries (paragraph 2). He presents Augustine with an objection that Consentius himself faced concerning the human nature of Christ, which he supposes was turned into God and did not, therefore, occupy a place after the resurrection (paragraph 3). Consentius quotes from his own writings on the unity of God and the trinity of persons and points out that the humanity assumed by Christ is not like a fourth person (paragraph 4). Consentius admits his difficulty in thinking of God as something non-bodily like righteousness (paragraph 5). Finally, he again pleads with Augustine for enlightenment and correction (paragraph 6).

*To his holy lord and most blessed bishop, Augustine, Consentius sends greetings.*

1. I had already suggested in a few words the nature of my request to your holy brother, bishop Alypius, a man admirable in my eyes for all the virtues of the mind, hoping that he would graciously consent to give me his help in presenting my petitions to you. But because the reason that forced you to go into the country deprived me of your presence,<sup>1</sup> I preferred to put my request in writing rather than have my mind waver in doubt while waiting, especially since, if you see the necessity of granting me what I ask for, the solitude of the place where you presently are may, in my opinion, be able to help your mind as it searches out the deepest mysteries. I myself, then, am personally and deeply convinced that the truth about things divine must be attained more by faith than by reason. For if the faith of the holy Church were grasped by reasoned argumentation and not by pious belief, no one except philosophers and professors would possess happiness. But because it pleased God, who chose the weak things of this world in order to confound the strong,<sup>2</sup> to save through the foolishness of preaching those who believe,<sup>3</sup> we should not so much require reasoning concerning God as we should follow the authority of the saints. After all, the Arians, who think that the Son, whom they admit is begotten, is less than the Father, would not persist in this impiety, nor would the Macedonians exclude from the seat of divinity, insofar as they can, the Holy Spirit, whom we believe to be neither begotten nor unbegotten, if they preferred to place their faith in the holy scriptures rather than in their own arguments.

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1. Augustine was convalescing on a country estate.

2. See 1 Cor 1:27.

3. See 1 Cor 1:21.

2. Nonetheless, O admirable man, if that Father of ours, who alone knows the mysteries and holds the key of David,<sup>4</sup> has granted that you penetrate by the gaze of your most pure heart the structure of the heavens and look upon the glory of the Lord with his face revealed, as scripture says,<sup>5</sup> to the extent that he who has given you such knowledge gives you the ability to express it, explain for us some portion of his ineffable substance and strive to express in words, to the extent you can with his help, an image of his likeness. For, unless you are there as guide and teacher in so great an undertaking, our thought is afraid to look upon it, even with squinting eyes, since it has been beaten back by the brilliance of so great a light. Enter, therefore, into the darkest cloud of the mysteries of God that turns aside our gaze. Correct, first in me myself and then in my books, the problems in the solution of which I know that I am mistaken, for I want to follow the authority of Your Holiness by faith rather than be deceived by a fallacious image of reasoning conceived in my heart.

3. With cautious simplicity I have heard and believed that the Lord Jesus Christ is light from light, as scripture says, *Announce well the day from the day, his salvation* (Ps 96:2), and in the Wisdom of Solomon, *For he is the brightness of eternal light* (Wis 7:26). Though I was not able to believe it as it should be, I believed, nonetheless, that God is an infinite magnitude of a certain inestimable light and that the human mind, though thinking lofty thoughts, is not sufficient to judge its quality nor measure its quantity nor imagine its beauty. I believed that there is something, whatever it is, which has an incomparable form and inestimable beauty, which at least Christ could see even with the eyes of the flesh. When toward the end of my first book, as you are undoubtedly so good as to recall, I wanted to prove that the Lord Jesus Christ, that is, the man he assumed, possessed divine power in such a way that the matter of the human flesh he assumed remained, I taught that nothing perished in those inner organs other than weakness. As a result, this puzzling question was raised as an objection for me. It asks, "If the man whom Christ assumed was turned into God, he therefore ought not occupy a place. Why, then, after the resurrection did he say, *Do not touch me for I have not yet ascended to my Father* (Jn 20:17)?"

4. I therefore strove to prove that Christ is everywhere by his power, but not by his action, by his divinity but not by his flesh, and I wrote concerning the unity of God and the Trinity of persons the following words. I said, "God is one, and the persons are three. God is not divided; the persons are distinct. God is within all things and above all things; he includes the lowest, fills those in the middle, and transcends the highest; he is poured out beyond all things and through all things. But the persons subsisting in themselves are distinguished by their proper character, not mingled in confusion. God, therefore, is one and is every-

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4. See Rev 3:7.

5. See 2 Cor 3:18.

where, because there is no other besides him and there is no empty place where another could be. All things are filled with God, and apart from God there is nothing. He is in the Father; he is in the Son; he is in the Holy Spirit; and for this reason the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are not many gods but the one God himself. And the Father is not the same as the Son, nor is the Son the same as the Holy Spirit. The Father is in the Son; the Son is in the Father; the Holy Spirit is in both, because the one and indivisible God dwells in three persons, that is, in persons distinct in number, not in rank, nor in power. Everything which belongs to the Father belongs to the Son, and everything which belongs to the Son belongs to the Father, and everything which belongs to each of them belongs to the Holy Spirit because they possess the substance of the deity not as an equal deity but as the very same, that is, the only and undivided deity. And for this reason one does not come before the other in either majesty or age, because what is full cannot be divided, nor is there in the fullness something which could divide the fullness and make a larger portion for one and a smaller for another. But in the persons it is not that way, because the person of the Father is not the Son's, nor is the person of the Son the same as that of the Holy Spirit. There is one power that the threefold power possesses; there is one substance in which there are the three that subsist. The Father, therefore, and the Son and the Holy Spirit are everywhere by their majesty, because they are one, but they are only in themselves in their persons because they are three." And piecing together other things of this sort, I came to the conclusion that I should maintain that the persons are also present everywhere, but that the divinity, which is one and the same in majesty, is above the heavens, across the seas, and beyond the lower world. And from this I showed that it must be understood that the man whom Christ assumed, having been turned into God, did not lose the nature he assumed but cannot, nonetheless, be considered like a fourth person.

5. But you are a man to whom it has been granted to enter into heaven, I think, by the subtlety of your thinking, for he is truthful who says, *Blessed are the clean of heart since they will see God* (Mt 5:8); you raise up above all the stars the loftiness of a clean heart to contemplation, and you say that God should not be thought of as some body. For, even if anyone should imagine with the mind a light a thousand times more bright and more intense than this sun, no likeness of God can be grasped in it, because everything that can be seen is a body, but just as we cannot think of righteousness or piety as bodily, unless we perhaps imagine some female bodies in accord with the vanity of the pagans, so we ought, insofar as we can, to think of God without any figment of the imagination. But for me, however, who can scarcely see the subtlety of your argument with my mind, it seems that nothing living is present according to substance in righteousness, and for this reason I still cannot think of God, that is, a living nature, as being like righteousness, because righteousness is not living in itself, but in us. In fact, we rather live in accord with righteousness, but righteousness itself

does not at all live by itself, unless righteousness is said to be not the righteousness of this human equity but only that righteousness that is God.

6. Hence I would like to be reassured on all these matters not only by the spoken word but also by a more ample letter. For it is not right that under your advice our feet alone should be called back from this road of error on which many walk. For many in those islands on which we dwell enter upon the path of this tortuous error, while they are moving toward the road on a straight route. But will there be an Augustine there to whose authority they may yield, whose teaching they may believe, and by whose mental powers they may be won over? Or do you perhaps out of your paternal affection prefer to guide me by private advice rather than to chastise me as a misguided companion? But since I desire to run for the benefit of my soul rather than for the praise of the world, your rebuke will not be without benefit for me and, for that reason, will not be disagreeable, especially since for both me and others it will bring forth both life and praise at the same time. For no one can be so unjust, I think, as to prefer to accuse me of stupidity because at one point I went astray rather than to judge me prudent<sup>6</sup> because I chose the correct path. For they should not be judged fools whom the apostle Paul admonished not to run after an uncertain goal when he said, *Run so that you may win* (1 Cor 9:24). Hence not only must we abandon this path that we are running but you must block and cut it off so that it does not also mislead those people by its false pretense of love. For, unless I am mistaken, you have been chosen not only to read the books I have already published but also to correct those you have examined. After all, in that letter that I put as a preface in those books of mine, there are written the following words: "It pleased God to stabilize by the thought of blessed Bishop Augustine the skiff of our faith as it was tossed about by the waves." Why, then, do you, O man who are the very summit of this teaching in Christ, hesitate to reprove openly a son who also needs to be corrected since, unless the anchor of your thought presses its bite in more deeply, it cannot make us stable with more certainty? For it is not a slight fault or question on which not only no progress is made but in which—as you most forcefully said—the blindness of our thinking also runs the risk of the grave sin of idolatry. I would like you to examine this carefully and wisely in order that the clarity of your teaching and mental abilities may wipe away the cloud of our mind so that we may see with the eyes of the heart what we cannot now think about, once it has been explained by the light of your intelligence. Safe and sound, blessed for eternity, and mindful of me, may you possess the heavenly kingdom, my holy lord and most blessed bishop.

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6. I have conjectured *prudentem* in place of *prudenter*.

## Letter 120

In 410, soon after the previous letter, Augustine replied to the questions of Consentius. Augustine urges Consentius to come to him so that they may converse about the questions Consentius raised (paragraph 1). He advises Consentius that he should not scorn either faith or reason (paragraph 2) and points out that believing should precede understanding in questions pertaining to salvation (paragraph 3), though the apostle Peter warned that we should be ready to give an account of our faith and hope (paragraph 4). There are, nonetheless, some mysteries of which a rational account cannot be given (paragraph 5). True reason leads to a love for understanding, and faith prepares the mind for true reasoning (paragraph 6).

Augustine warns Consentius that because of our familiarity with bodily things we find it difficult to think of God as non-bodily (paragraph 7). He discusses the relations between reason and faith and insists that a believer ought to desire to see what he can now only believe (paragraph 8). We can only believe past visible events, but we believe in visible events to come, such as the resurrection, so that we hope to see them. Invisible realities are seen when they are understood (paragraph 9). We now believe in some lasting visible realities, such as Christ's risen body, which we hope to see with the eyes of our risen bodies (paragraph 10).

Augustine distinguishes three kinds of things we see: bodies, images or likenesses of bodies, and things that are neither bodies nor likenesses of bodies (paragraph 11). The Trinity might seem not to belong among the third kind of reality because it is so different from goods of our mind like justice and charity (paragraph 12). Augustine urges Consentius to hold to the faith in God as one and three and to drive from his mind any images in thinking about the Trinity (paragraph 13). He discusses the sense in which God is in heaven, though he is whole everywhere (paragraph 14), and warns that we should not think of Christ's risen body as seated at the Father's right hand in a bodily sense (paragraph 15).

Augustine warns Consentius that he must reject the view that the Father as one person in the Trinity is in heaven, while his divinity is everywhere, as if divinity were a quality common to the Father and the Son (paragraph 16). He explains that the divinity of the Trinity cannot be a quality but must be the substance of the Trinity (paragraph 17). Augustine then deals with Consentius' problem in thinking of God as being like righteousness, which he regards as lifeless (paragraph 18). He insists, rather, that God is righteousness that is living through itself and immutably (paragraph 19). Even though God's righteousness is vastly superior to our righteousness, the righteousness in us is the beauty of our soul, and our soul is made to the image of God (paragraph 20).

*To Consentius, his most beloved brother who is to be honored in the heart of Christ, Augustine sends greetings in the Lord.*

1. I asked you to come to visit us precisely because I was greatly pleased with your talent revealed in your books. Hence I wanted you to read certain small works of ours, which I thought to be very useful for you, not while you were situated far from us, but rather in our presence. In that way you could, while present, ask without any difficulty about those ideas that you might perhaps understand less well, and from our discussion and conversation with each other you yourself would recognize and you yourself would correct, to the extent that the Lord granted me to explain and you to grasp, what needed correction in your books. You certainly have the ability to explain what you held; you also have the goodness and humility to merit to hold the truth. And I am now of the same opinion, which ought not to displease you either. For this reason I recently advised you that in these works of ours, which you are reading at home, you should make marks at those passages that trouble you and that you should come to me with them and ask about each of them. I urge you to do what you have not yet done. You would be right, of course, to be shy and to hesitate to do this if you had chosen to do so even once and had found me difficult. I had also said, when I heard from you that you were tired of very defective manuscripts, that you should read ours, which you would discover have fewer errors than the others.

2. But you ask that I carefully and prudently discuss the question of the Trinity, that is, of the unity of the divinity and the distinction of the persons, in order that the clarity of my teaching and mind may, as you put it, wipe away the fog of your mind so that you may be able to see somehow with your eyes what you cannot now imagine, after I have clarified it by the light of intelligence. See first whether this request is in harmony with your earlier conviction. Earlier in the same letter in which you make this request, you say that you had determined for yourself that “the truth about things divine must be attained more by faith than by reason. For,” you say, “if the faith of the holy Church were grasped by reasoned argumentation and not by pious belief, no one except philosophers and professors would possess happiness. But because it pleased God, who chose the weak things of this world in order to confound the strong,<sup>1</sup> to save through the foolishness of preaching those who believe,<sup>2</sup> we should not so much require reasoning concerning God as we should follow the authority of the saints.”<sup>3</sup> See, then, whether in accord with your words you ought not rather, especially on this topic in which above all our faith consists, to follow only the authority of the saints and not ask of me a rational account in order to understand it. For, when I begin to introduce you to some extent to an understanding of this mystery—and if God does not help interiorly, I shall be

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1. See 1 Cor 1:27.

2. See 1 Cor 1:21.

3. Letter 119, 1.



utterly unable to do so—I shall do nothing else in my explanation than give a rational account to the extent I am able. And if you not unreasonably demand of me or of any teacher that you may understand what you believe, correct your conviction, not so that you reject faith, but so that what you already hold with the firmness of faith you may also see with the light of reason.

3. Heaven forbid, after all, that God should hate in us that by which he made us more excellent than the other animals. Heaven forbid, I say, that we should believe in such a way that we do not accept or seek a rational account, since we could not even believe if we did not have rational souls. In certain matters, therefore, pertaining to the teaching of salvation, which we cannot yet grasp by reason, but which we will be able to at some point, faith precedes reason so that the heart may be purified in order that it may receive and sustain the light of the great reason, which is, of course, a demand of reason! And so, the prophet stated quite reasonably, *Unless you believe, you will not understand* (Is 7:9 LXX). There he undoubtedly distinguished these two and gave the counsel that we should believe first in order that we may be able to understand what we believe. Hence it was reasonably commanded that faith should precede reason. For, if this command is not reasonable it is, therefore, unreasonable. Heaven forbid! If, then, it is reasonable that faith precede reason with respect to certain great truths that cannot yet be grasped, however slight the reason is that persuades us to this, it undoubtedly also comes before faith.

4. Hence the apostle Peter warns that we should be ready to respond to everyone who asks us for an account of our faith and hope<sup>4</sup> because, if an unbeliever asks me for an account of my faith and hope and I see that, before he believes, he cannot grasp it, I give him this very argument by which he may, if possible, see how preposterous it is to demand before faith an account of those things that he cannot grasp. But if a believer asks for an account in order that he may understand what he believes, we must look at his ability in order that, when an account has been given in accord with it, he may derive as great an understanding of his faith as is possible: a greater understanding if he grasps more, a smaller understanding if he grasps less. Yet until he comes to the fullness and perfection of knowledge, let him not depart from the journey of faith. This is the reason why the apostle says, *And even if you have some other ideas, God will also reveal it to you; let us, nonetheless, continue to walk in the path to which we have come* (Phil 3:15-16). If, then, we are already believers, we have come to the way of faith, and, if we do not give it up, we shall undoubtedly come not only to as great an understanding of incorporeal and immutable things as can be grasped in this life, though not by all, but also to the peak of contemplation, which the apostle calls *face to face* (1 Cor 13:12). For certain people, even the simplest who, nonetheless, walk with great perseverance in the path of faith, come to that most blessed contemplation. But there are those who

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4. See 1 Pt 3:15.

somehow already know what the invisible, immutable, incorporeal nature is and refuse to hold onto the way that leads to so great an abode of happiness, because it seems foolish to them. That way is Christ crucified. And hence they cannot arrive at the temple of that rest by the light of which their mind is now touched as it sheds its ray from afar.

5. There are, however, certain things to which, when we hear them, we do not give credence, and after a rational account has been given, we know that those things that we cannot believe are true. None of God's miracles are believed by those without faith precisely because they do not see their rational explanation. And there really are some for which a rational explanation cannot be given, though there is one. After all, what is there in the world that God has created without a reason? But it is even beneficial that the reason for some of his marvelous works is to some extent hidden so that the knowledge of that same reason does not make them seem worthless in the minds of the bored and jaded. For there are not only a few, but many, who are drawn more by a wonder over things than by a knowledge of their causes, which makes miracles cease to be sources of amazement. And it is necessary to arouse them to a faith in invisible things by visible miracles in order that, having been purified by love, they may come to where they cease to be filled with wonder because of familiarity with the truth. For human beings are filled with wonder at the tightrope walker in a theater, and they are delighted by musicians. In the first case they are awed by the difficulty; in the latter the sweetness of the sounds holds and nourishes them.

6. I wanted to say these things in order to encourage your faith toward a love for the understanding to which true reasoning leads and for which faith prepares the minds. For there is a reasoning that leads to the belief that, in that Trinity which is God, the Son is not coeternal with the Father or is of another substance and the Holy Spirit is unlike in some respect and in that way inferior. So, too, there is a reasoning that leads to the belief that the Father and the Son are of the same substance but the Holy Spirit is of another substance. Such reasoning, it must be said, is to be shunned and detested not because it is reasoning but because it is false reasoning. For, if the reasoning were true, it would not, of course, have fallen into error. Hence, just as you ought not to avoid all speech because there is also speech that is false, so you ought not to avoid all reasoning because there is also reasoning that is false. I would say this of wisdom as well. After all, wisdom is not to be avoided because there is also wisdom that is false, a wisdom for which Christ crucified is foolishness,<sup>5</sup> though he is the power of God and the wisdom of God.<sup>6</sup> And so through this foolishness of preaching it pleased God to save those who believe, because the foolishness of God is wiser than human beings.<sup>7</sup> Certain

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5. See 1 Cor 1:18.

6. See 1 Cor 1:24.

7. See 1 Cor 1:21.25.

philosophers and professors who were following not the true way but one like the truth, and who were misleading themselves and others by it, could not be convinced of this, but some of them could be. And, for those who could be, Christ crucified is neither a scandal nor foolishness; they are, after all, among the Jews and Greeks who have been called and for whom he is the power of God and the wisdom of God.<sup>8</sup> On that way, that is, in the faith of Christ crucified, those who were able to grasp its correctness by the grace of God, even if they were called philosophers or professors, certainly confessed with humble piety that fishermen had preceded them, who were more excellent than they were not only by the most firm strength of believing but also by the most certain truth of understanding. For when they learned that the foolish and weak of the world were chosen in order to confound the strong and the wise,<sup>9</sup> and when they realized that they were wise with false wisdom and strong with a feeble strength, they were confounded with a saving confusion, and they became foolish and weak in order that through the foolishness and weakness of God, which is wiser and stronger than human beings, they might become truly wise and really strong among the foolish and weak whom God has chosen.

2. 7. Faithful piety, however, respects only the truest reason so that we do not hesitate to overthrow a certain idolatry that the weakness of human thought tries to build up in our heart because of our familiarity with visible things and so that we do not dare to believe that the invisible, incorporeal, immutable Trinity, which we worship, is like three living masses, though very large and beautiful, each bounded by the limits of its own space and clinging to one another by close proximity in their places. It makes no difference whether one of them is located in the middle so that it separates the two joined to it on each side or whether, arranged like a triangle, each touches the others so that none is separated from another. We do not dare to believe that those three great and good persons, though in very great masses, still bounded on top, on the bottom, and on every side, have the one divinity as a fourth something, not like one of them, but common to all of them as the deity of all, whole in all and in each one, and that because of this one divinity the same Trinity is said to be one God. We do not dare to believe that its three persons are nowhere but in the heavens, while that divinity is absent nowhere but is present everywhere. We do not dare to believe that for this reason it is correct to say that God is both in heaven and on earth on account of that divinity that is everywhere and common to the three, but that it is not correct to say that the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit is on earth, since this Trinity has its abode only in heaven. When true reason begins to undermine this construction and vain figment of carnal thinking, let us immediately hasten, with the interior help and enlightenment of him who does not want to dwell in

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8. See 1 Cor 1:24.

9. See 1 Cor 1:27. ◻

our hearts along with such idols, to smash them and to shake them from our faith so that we allow not even any dust of such phantasms to remain there.

8. Hence, in order to clothe us with piety, faith had to precede in our heart the reasoned argumentation by which, once we have been admonished externally, we see that these ideas are false because the truth shines interiorly. If faith had not come first, would we not have heard the truth to no purpose? And for this reason, because faith did what pertained to it, reason followed along and found some of those things that it was seeking. We ought undoubtedly, therefore, to prefer to false reasoning not only the reasoning by which we understand what we believe but also the very faith in those things we have not yet understood. For it is better to believe what is true, though it is not yet seen, than to think you see something true, which is in fact false. For faith has eyes of its own by which it somehow sees that what it does not yet see is true and by which it most certainly sees that it does not yet see what it believes. But one who now understands by true reason what he before only believed should certainly be preferred to one who still desires to understand what he believes. But if he does not even desire to understand and thinks that those things which should be understood ought only to be believed, he does not know the benefit faith brings. For pious faith does not want to be without hope and love. A believer, therefore, ought to believe what he does not yet see in such a way that he both hopes for and loves that vision.

9. And for past visible events, which have passed away in time, there is only faith, because we no longer hope to see them but believe that they happened and passed away. Such is the fact that Christ once died for our sins and rose, that he now no longer dies, and that death will no longer have dominion over him.<sup>10</sup> But we believe in those events that are not yet, but are future, such as the resurrection of our spiritual bodies, in such a way that we also hope that we will see them. Yet we can now in no way point to them. Those things that exist so that they neither pass away nor are in the future, but last eternally, however, are in part invisible, like justice and like wisdom, and they are in part visible, like the body of Christ, which is now immortal. But invisible things are perceived when they are understood, and for this reason they are seen in a manner appropriate to them. And when they are seen, they are much more certain than those things that the senses of the body attain, but they are called "invisible" because they cannot be seen at all by these mortal eyes. But those lasting things that are visible can, if they are shown to us, be perceived even by these mortal eyes. In that way the Lord showed himself to the disciples after the resurrection,<sup>11</sup> and in that way he showed himself to the apostle Paul<sup>12</sup> and the deacon Stephen after the ascension.<sup>13</sup>

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10. See Rom 6:9-10; also 1 Pt 3:18.

11. See Mt 28, Mk 16, and Lk 24.

12. See Acts 9:3-4.27.

13. See Acts 7:55.

10. Hence we believe in these lasting visible things so that, even if they are not shown to us, we hope that we will at some time see them, and we do not try to grasp them by reason or intellect except in order that we might think of them as more distinct from invisible things, since they are visible. And when in thought we imagine what they are, we know quite well that we do not know them. For I think of Antioch, which I do not know, but not in the way in which I think of Carthage, which I do know. For my thinking fashions for itself that former vision, but recalls the latter; I in no way, nonetheless, doubt what I have believed about the former on the basis of many witnesses or what I have believed about the latter on the basis of my own eyes. But we do not imagine justice and wisdom and other things of that sort in one way and gaze upon them in another, but we perceive these invisible things, which are understood by the simple attention of the mind and reason, without any bodily forms or masses, without any lines or shapes of members, without an spatial areas, whether finite or infinite. The very light by which we distinguish all these, in which it is quite clear to us what we believe though it is unknown, what we hold as known, what form of a body we recall and what we make up in thought, what the sense of the body attains and what the mind imagines like a body, what the intelligence contemplates as certain and utterly unlike all bodies—this light, then, in which all these things are distinguished is not, of course, poured out like the brightness of this sun or of any bodily light through stretches of space and in every direction. And it does not illumine our mind as if by a visible splendor but invisibly and ineffably, and it shines, nonetheless, in an intelligible manner. It is as certain for us as it makes certain for us what we see in accord with it.

11. There are three kinds of things that are seen. The first kind includes corporeal things like this sky and this earth and whatever the senses of the body see or touch in them. The second kind includes those things like bodies, such as we think up and imagine in the spirit or that we contemplate as if they were bodies, whether they are recalled or are presented to us. From these there also come the visions that in dreams or in some transport of the mind are presented with these seemingly spatial quantities. A third kind distinct from both is neither a body nor has likeness to a body, such as wisdom, which is perceived as understood by the mind and in whose light we truthfully judge concerning all these things. In which of these kinds are we to believe that this Trinity that we want to know is found? Surely it is either in one of them or in none. If it is in one, it is in that which is more excellent than the other two, as is wisdom. If it is his gift in us, it is also less than that highest and immutable wisdom, which is called the wisdom of God. I do not think that we ought to suppose the giver to be less than his gift. But if it is a ray of that wisdom in us, which is called our wisdom, to the extent that we can grasp it through a glass and in an enigma<sup>14</sup> we must distinguish it both from all bodies and from all likenesses of bodies.

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14. See 1 Cor 13:12.

12. But if this Trinity should not be thought to be in any of these kinds, and if it is invisible in such a way that it is not seen even by the mind, much less should we have concerning it such an opinion that we believe it is like corporeal things or like the images of corporeal things. For it does not surpass bodies in the beauty or greatness of its mass but in the dissimilarity and unlikeness of its nature. And we, of course, do not value by the mass of their body the goods of our mind, like wisdom, justice, love, chastity, and the others of this sort, nor do we represent them in thought by corporeal forms of them. Rather, when we correctly understand them, we see them in the light of the mind without any bodily nature and without any likeness of a bodily nature. If the Trinity differs in comparison with such goods of our mind, how much does it differ in comparison with all bodily qualities and quantities! And yet the apostle bears witness that it is not utterly alien to our intellect when he says, *For his invisible reality is seen as understood from the creation of the world through those things which have been made, even his everlasting power and divinity* (Rom 1:20). And for this reason the same Trinity, which made both the body and the soul, is undoubtedly more excellent than both of them. If, then, we consider the soul, especially the human, rational, and intellectual soul, which was made to his image, and if it does not surpass our thoughts and intelligence, but we can apprehend by the mind and intelligence the soul's principal part, namely, the mind and intelligence, it will perhaps not be absurd that we should consider raising it up to understand its creator with his help. But if it fails in itself and succumbs to itself, let it be content with pious faith as long as it is on its journey away from the Lord until there comes about in the human being what God promised, when he brings it about *who is able to do more than we ask for or understand* (Eph 3:20).

3. 13. Since that is so, I want in the meanwhile for you to read those many things that we have already written pertinent to this question as well as those that we are still working on and cannot yet resolve on account of the magnitude of so great a question. But now hold with unshakeable faith that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are a trinity and that there is, nonetheless, one God, not that the divinity is common to these as if it were a fourth, but that it is itself the ineffably inseparable Trinity. Hold that the Father begot the Son, that only the Son was begotten of the Father, and that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of both of them. And when you think of it, drive away, remove, deny, spurn, cast aside, and flee whatever comes to mind with the likeness of a body. For it is no small beginning in the knowledge of God if, before we can know what he is, we already now begin to know what he is not. But love understanding very much, because even the holy scriptures themselves, which exhort us to have faith before the understanding of important realities, cannot be useful to you unless you correctly understand them. All the heretics who accept them as authoritative think that they follow them, though they follow their own errors instead, and for this reason they are heretics, not because they scorn the scriptures but because they do not understand them.

14. But you, my dearest friend, pray vigorously and faithfully that the Lord may give you understanding and that what the care of an instructor or teacher applies externally can thus bear fruit, for *neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is of any importance, but God who gives the increase* (1 Cor 3:7). To him we say, *Our Father who art in heaven* (Mt 6:9), not because he, who by his incorporeal presence is whole everywhere, is there and is not here, but because he is said to dwell in those pious souls in whom he is present. And these are most of all in the heavens, where our citizenship is also,<sup>15</sup> if our lips truthfully reply that we have our heart lifted up.<sup>16</sup> For even if we interpret carnally the words of scripture, *The heavens is my chair, but the earth is the stool for my feet* (Is 66:1), we ought to believe that he is both there and here, though he is not whole there because his feet are here, and he is not whole here because the upper parts of his body are there. Again, the words of scripture about him, *He who has measured the heavens with the palm of his hand and the earth with his fist* (Is 40:12), can drive from us that carnal way of thinking. After all, who would sit in the space of a palm of the hand or put his feet in a place as small as his fist can grasp, unless perhaps the vain flesh has gone so far that it is too little for it to ascribe human members to the substance of God, if it does not also make them monstrous so that the palm is wider than the hips and the fist is wider than two feet joined together? But these things are said so that when what we hear is inconsistent, if it is taken in a carnal sense, we are admonished by it to think of ineffably spiritual things.

15. Hence, even if we think of the body of the Lord, which he raised from the tomb and carried up to heaven, only in terms of human form and members, we should not think that he sits at the right hand of the Father<sup>17</sup> so that the Father seems to sit at his left. In that blessedness, of course, which surpasses all human understanding, there is only the right hand, and that same right hand is the term for that blessedness. Hence we should not interpret those words that he spoke to Mary after his resurrection, *Do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father* (Jn 20:17), in such an absurd manner that we think that he wanted to be touched by women after he had ascended, though he allowed himself to be touched by men before he had ascended. But when he said that to Mary, who, of course, symbolized the Church, he wanted her to understand that he had then ascended to the Father when she recognized him as equal to the Father and touched him with such faith conducive to salvation. Otherwise she would not touch him in the right way if she believed that he was only what she saw in the flesh. In that way the heretic Photinus<sup>18</sup> touched him who believed that he was only a man.

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15. See Phil 3:20.

16. An allusion to the beginning of the preface at Mass.

17. See Mk 16:19.

18. Photinus was a heretic during the fourth century; he was bishop of Sirmium in Pannonia and condemned for holding that Christ was only an extraordinary man who was adopted as God's son.

16. Even if something more suitable and better can perhaps be understood from these words of the Lord, we must, nonetheless, undoubtedly reject the opinion that holds that the substance of the Father were in heaven insofar as the Father is one person in the Trinity, but that the divinity is not only in heaven but everywhere, as if the Father were one thing and his divinity, which is common to him along with the Son and with the Holy Spirit, were another. For it implies that the Trinity itself is equivalently in bodily places and bodily, while the one divinity of the three persons is present everywhere and that it alone, as incorporeal, is whole everywhere. After all, if it were a quality of them—and heaven forbid that in the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit quality should be one thing and substance another—if, nonetheless, it could be a quality of them, it could, of course, not be anywhere more fully than in its own substance. But if it is a substance and is other than they are, it is another substance, and that is a completely false belief.

17. But if you perhaps understand less well the difference between a substance and a quality, you certainly more readily notice the fact that the divinity of the Trinity—which is thought to be other than the Trinity itself and, on this account, is said to be not three gods, but one God, because it is one and common to the three—is either a substance or is not a substance. If it is a substance and is other than the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit or than the Trinity itself taken together, it is undoubtedly another substance. The truth, however, refutes and rejects this. But if this divinity is not a substance and is God because it is whole everywhere, but that Trinity is not, then God is not a substance. What Catholic would say this? So too, if this divinity is not a substance and if the Trinity is one God because of it, because this divinity is one in the three, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit ought not to be said to be of one substance, but of one divinity, which is not a substance. But you acknowledge in the Catholic faith that it is true, that it is reaffirmed as true, that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are one God, because they are the Trinity, for they are inseparably of one and the same substance or—if this is a better term—essence. After all, some of ours, especially the Greeks, said that the Trinity that is God is one essence rather than one substance, supposing and understanding that there is some difference between those two terms. On this issue there is no need to argue at present, and even if we said that this divinity, which is thought to be something other than the Trinity itself, is not a substance, but an essence, the same error would result. For, if it is other than the Trinity itself, it will be another essence. Heaven forbid that a Catholic should think that! It remains, then, that we should believe that the Trinity is of one substance in the sense that the essence itself is not other than the Trinity. However much we may advance toward seeing this in the present life, it will be in a glass and in an enigma that we shall see it.<sup>19</sup> But when we begin to have a spiritual body, which is promised in the resurrec-

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19. See 1 Cor 13:12.



tion, whether we see it by the mind or in a wondrous way also by the body, since the grace of a spiritual body is ineffable, we shall in accord with our capacity, nonetheless, see it, but not in various places nor as smaller in one part and larger in another, because it is not a body and is everywhere whole.

4. 18. But you put in your letter that you think or rather that you thought "that nothing living is present according to substance in righteousness" and that you "still cannot think of God, that is, a living nature, as being like righteousness, because righteousness," as you say, "is not living in itself, but in us. In fact, we rather live in accord with it, but righteousness does not live at all by itself."<sup>20</sup> In order that you may reply to yourself, look at whether one can correctly say that life itself, which causes to live whatever we do not falsely say is alive, does not live. For I think that it seems absurd to you that life causes things to live and does not itself live. But if life itself by which everything living lives is especially living, recall, please, the souls that the divine scriptures call dead; you will, of course, find that they are unjust, impious, and unbelieving. And by reason of them the bodies of the impious live of which it was said, *Let the dead bury their dead* (Mt 8:22), and there even wicked souls are understood not to be without some life. For bodies could not live because of them in any other way than because of some sort of life, which souls cannot completely be without. For this reason they are rightly called immortal. They are, nonetheless, said to be dead after having lost righteousness for no other reason than that righteousness, as the life of their lives, is a truer and greater life, even for souls that are living immortally by some sort of life. Since souls are in bodies, the bodies themselves are also alive, though they cannot live by themselves. Hence, if souls cannot but somehow live in themselves, because by reason of them even bodies live, and bodies die when they are abandoned by souls, how much more must true righteousness be understood also to live in itself, since by reason of it even souls live so that, if this righteousness is lost, they are called dead, although they do not cease to live with some sort of life.

19. But that righteousness that lives in itself is undoubtedly God, and it lives immutably. However, just as, though it is life in itself, it also becomes life in us, when we become partakers of it in some way, so though righteousness exists in itself, it also comes to be in us when we live righteously by clinging to it, and we are more or less righteous the more or the less we cling to it. Hence scripture says of the only-begotten Son of God that, though he is the wisdom and righteousness of the Father and always exists in himself, he became *for us wisdom and righteousness from God and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as scripture says, "He who boasts may boast in the Lord"* (1 Cor 1:30-31). You yourself saw this, of course, when you added and said, "Unless righteousness is said to be not the righteousness of this human equity but only that righteousness that is

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20. See Letter 119, 5.

God.”<sup>21</sup> That God most high is clearly true righteousness, and that true God is the highest righteousness. To hunger and thirst for it<sup>22</sup> is, of course, our righteousness during this sojourn, and to have our fill of it afterwards is our full righteousness in eternity. Let us, then, not think of God as like our righteousness, but let us rather think of ourselves as more like God, the more we can be more righteous by participation.

20. If, then, we must avoid thinking that God is like our righteousness because the light that enlightens<sup>23</sup> is incomparably more excellent than that which is enlightened, how much more ought we to avoid believing that he is something inferior and somehow more degenerate than our righteousness is! But what else is righteousness when it is in us, or any other virtue by which one lives correctly and wisely, than the beauty of the inner person? And we were surely made to the image of God in accord with this beauty rather than in accord with the body. For this reason we are told, *Do not be conformed to this world, but be reformed in the newness of your mind that you may test what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect* (Rom 12:2). If, then, we say or know or want the mind to be beautiful, not in its mass nor in parts spatially separated, as we distinguish or think of bodies, but in its intelligible virtue, such as righteousness, and if we are reformed in terms of this beauty to the image of God, surely the beauty of God himself, who has formed us and is reforming us to his image, is not to be looked for in some bodily mass, and he must be believed to be incomparably more beautiful than the minds of the righteous, insofar as he is incomparably more righteous. With respect to the usual length of letters this letter is perhaps longer than you expected, but with respect to the inquiry about so important a topic let it suffice to have briefly reminded Your Charity, not in the sense that it should suffice for your education, but in the sense that, after having been carefully instructed by reading or hearing other works, you yourself may more extensively correct your own statements made in another vein. That is, of course, better to the degree that it is done with more humility and more faith.

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21. See Letter 119, 5.

22. See Mt 5:6.

23. See Jn 1:9.

## Letter 121

Most likely in 413 Paulinus of Nola wrote to Augustine a letter in which he proposed a series of biblical questions. After a brief introduction (paragraph 1), Paulinus poses questions concerning Psalms 15 and 16 (paragraphs 2-8); then he adds questions based on the Letters of Paul (paragraphs 9-13), and finally he poses questions drawn from the Gospels (paragraphs 14-18). Augustine answers these questions in Letter 149. This letter lacks the usual salutation.

1. I. So that you do not reply to me without receiving some reward, I shall propose some questions concerning a few things that come to mind in my rush because of the haste of the letter carrier, who is already running to the ship. If these questions are clear, they still seem obscure to me. Let none of your wise disciples, perhaps some of our brothers, who may stand in your presence at the time you read this from our letter, laugh at my foolishness, but let them out of a benevolence of brotherly love help to instruct me in order that I might come to have a share with those who see and who contemplate the wonders of the law of the Lord with minds enlightened by your teaching.

2. Tell me, then, blessed teacher of Israel, what do the words mean in Psalm Fifteen: *For the holy ones who are in his land, he has done among them all the marvelous things that he willed. For their infirmities have been increased; they hurried after them* (Ps 16:3-4). Whom does he call "the holy ones who are in his land"? Are they those Jews who, as children of Abraham's flesh and not children of the promise, are excluded from the offspring who was named after Isaac?<sup>1</sup> Then they are the holy ones on earth because they are holy by reason of their carnal lineage, but in their life and mind they are earthly because they have earthly thoughts,<sup>2</sup> and in their carnal observance they grow old in the oldness of the letter,<sup>3</sup> not reborn into a new creature, because they did not accept him through whom the old things passed away and new things came to be.<sup>4</sup> For he perhaps calls them the holy ones in that psalm in the same way as he calls them righteous in the gospel, where he says, *I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners* (Mt 9:13), that is, those righteous who boast in the holiness of their lineage and in the letter of the law. To these he said, *Do not boast of your father Abraham because God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones* (Mt 3:9). An example of these is set before us in that Pharisee.<sup>5</sup> In

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1. See Rom 9:8,7, Heb 11:18, and Gn 21:12.

2. See Phil 3:19.

3. See Rom 7:6.

4. See 2 Cor 5:17.

5. See Lk 18:11.

recalling his righteousness for the Lord, as if God did not know it, he spoke out, not praying that he might be heard but demanding as if it were owed to the merit of his works, good ones, though displeasing to God. For, though righteousness builds up, pride tears down. And he did not make this appeal in silence, but aloud, so that it is clear that he did not speak for God's ears, since he wanted to be heard by human beings as well. And so he was not pleasing to God because he was pleased with himself. *For the Lord has scattered the bones of human beings who were pleased with themselves. They became confused, he said, because he spurned them* (Ps 53:6), who does not spurn a humble and contrite heart.<sup>6</sup>

3. Finally, in the parable of the gospel in which the persons of the Pharisee and the tax collector are compared, the Lord himself clearly shows what he welcomes in a human being and what he rejects,<sup>7</sup> for God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.<sup>8</sup> For this reason he testifies that the tax collector left the temple justified from the confession of his sins rather than the Pharisee from the declaration of his righteousness. Rightly, however, that man, filled with praise for himself, left the presence of God as rejected. For, though by his very title he laid claim to expertise in the law, he forgot that the Lord said in the prophet, *In whom shall I dwell if not in the one who is humble, peaceful, and fears my words?* (Is 66:2). The other man who accuses himself in his contrite heart is accepted and obtains pardon for the sins he confessed on account of the grace of humility, while that holy Pharisee—with such holiness as the Jews had—carries away the burden of his sins because of his boast of sanctity. He is, of course, the model of those Jews of whom the apostle says that, in desiring to establish their own righteousness, which comes from the law, they were not subject to the righteousness of God,<sup>9</sup> which comes from faith. That faith was credited to our father, Abraham, as righteousness, not on the basis of works, but because he believed God in accord with God's omnipotence.<sup>10</sup> Before God he is truly righteous who lives from faith,<sup>11</sup> and he is not holy on the earth but in heaven, because he does not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit.<sup>12</sup> After all, his manner of living is in heaven.<sup>13</sup> He does not boast in the circumcision of the flesh but in the circumcision of the heart, which is led invisibly not by the letter but by the spirit, and for this reason his praise comes not from human beings but from God.<sup>14</sup>

6. See Ps 51:19.

7. See Lk 18:10-14.

8. See Jas 4:6, 1 Pt 5:5, and Prv 3:34.

9. See Rom 10:3.

10. See Rom 4:2-3.

11. See Heb 10:38 and Rom 1:17.

12. See Rom 8:4 and Gal 5:16.

13. See Phil 3:20.

14. See Rom 2:29.

4. Next, I believe that he says the words which he adds in the same verse, *He has done among them all the marvelous things that he willed* (Ps 16:3), because he lighted the lamp of the law for them first and gave them the commandments for their lives. For scripture says, *He made known to Moses his ways and his will to the children of Israel* (Ps 103:7). Then he brought about in their midst the very sacrament of his goodness:<sup>15</sup> God born in the flesh in their own people and made man from their flesh from the offspring of David.<sup>16</sup> Next he produced the miracles of healing, which he accomplished among them and before their eyes. But they not only did not believe in him because of these, but they even blasphemed him when they said, *If this man were from God, he would not heal on the sabbath* (Jn 9:16), and, *He does not cast out demons save by the power of Beelzebul, the prince of demons* (Mt 12:24). On account of this mind blinded with hardened impiety their infirmities and darkness were increased.

5. But why does it say, *Afterward they rushed* (Ps 16:4)? Was it toward repentance, like those in the Acts of the Apostles who were moved by the preaching of Peter and believed in him whom they had crucified and, hurrying to be purified of so great a sin, ran to the gift of grace?<sup>17</sup> Or, since the powers of the soul are strengthened by faith and the love of God, were the infirmities of soul increased for these impious people who were devoid of both because their souls were filled with deadly diseases from the impiety of their sins? For Christ is the light and life of those who believe,<sup>18</sup> and there is salvation beneath his wings.<sup>19</sup> Hence it is not surprising if their darkness and infirmities were increased for their destruction, since they did not receive the life and light, nor did they want to remain under his wings. As he himself solemnly declares with tears in his gospel, he often wanted to gather them under his wings as a chicken gathers her chicks, and they were unwilling.<sup>20</sup> Where, then, did they rush when their infirmities were increased? Perhaps to clamoring for the crucifixion of the Lord and insisting upon it with their wicked cries despite Pilate's reluctance<sup>21</sup> in order that they might fill up the measure of their fathers,<sup>22</sup> namely, so that they whose fathers killed the prophets who announced that the savior of this world would come might kill the Lord of the prophets. *Afterwards they rushed*, for their feet were quick to spill blood. *Destruction and unhappiness lie in their ways, and they have not known the way of peace* (Ps 14:3), that is, Christ who says, *I am the way* (Jn 14:6).

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15. See 1 Tm 3:16.

16. See Rom 1:3.

17. See Acts 2:37-41.

18. See Jn 1:9, 8:12, 11:25, 14:16.

19. See Ps 91:4.

20. See Mt 23:37.

21. See Lk 23:23.

22. See Mt 23:32.

6. In the following psalm I want you to explain this point to me, namely, why it says, *Their belly has been filled with your hidden goods. They are satisfied with pork*, or, as I hear is written in certain psalters, *They have an abundance of children, and they have left to their little ones the extra they had* (Ps 17:14).<sup>23</sup>

7. Again in another psalm I am often amazed, when I understand the Son speaking to the Father in Psalm Fifty-Eight. There he had said above concerning the hostile Jews, *See, they will speak with their mouth, but there is a sword on their lips* (Ps 59:7), and he says a little below, *Do not kill them for fear that they may at some time forget your law. Scatter them in your power, and destroy them, O Lord* (Ps 58:11). We see that this is being fulfilled in them up to the present day, for they have been brought down from their old glory and live scattered among all the nations without a temple, without sacrifices, and without prophets. But why should we be surprised that through the prophet he already pleaded that they not be killed since he prayed for them at the very time of his Passion, when they were leading him to the cross? He said, *Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing* (Lk 23:34). But I admit that the addition, *for fear that they may at some time forget your law*, is not clear to me, seeming to imply as it does that for this reason their life lacks faith in the gospel. After all, what does their remembering and meditating on the law contribute to their salvation, which is acquired only by faith? Is it perhaps that the letter of the old law may endure on account of the dignity of the law and of the people of Abraham, even in the earthly part of his carnal offspring, which is seen to be counted like the sand of the sea,<sup>24</sup> in order that some might perhaps be enlightened by reading the law and come to believe in Christ, who is the end of the law and the prophets<sup>25</sup> and who is clearly prefigured and predicted in all their books? Or is it because from those unbelievers among them the generation of the elect will come who will be chosen from the individual tribes and included in the twelve thousand from each tribe?<sup>26</sup> The revelation of blessed John, who foretells this in the voice of an angel, bears this testimony to them, namely, that they will cling more closely to the court of the eternal king, utterly spotless and having had no sexual intercourse. Of these he says in particular, *They follow the Lamb wherever he goes because they have not become defiled with women, for they are virgins* (Rev 14:4).

8. In the Seventy-Sixth Psalm, that passage apart from some others is most obscure for me that says, *God, nonetheless, has crushed the heads of his enemies, the crown of hair of those who walk in their sins* (Ps 68:22). What does "the crown of hair" and "walk in sins" mean? After all, he did not say, "The

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23. The difference in the Latin derives from confusion of the Greek *υἱῶν* (sons) with *υἷων* (pigs). Jerome's translation from the Hebrew has "sons."

24. See Gn 22:17 and 32:12.

25. See Rom 10:4.

26. See Rv 7:4-8.

crown of the head," but, *The crown of hair*, which has no meaning. Does he want to show that a human being is filled with sins? Scripture says, *Every heart is in pain from the feet up to the head* (Is 1:6). And a little further on he says, *May the tongues of your dogs [be red] from your enemies from that* (Ps 68:24). What "that"? Does he call the nations the dogs of God, since the Lord himself called them dogs in the gospel?<sup>27</sup> Or does he perhaps call the dogs of God those who can be regarded as such, if any live like pagans while bearing the name of Christians, since their lot is put with unbelievers because they deny by their deeds the God whom they worship by their words?

2. 9. Enough on the psalms; I would now like to propose some questions from the apostle. He tells the Ephesians<sup>28</sup> what in another letter he had said about the levels and kinds of God's providence in accord with which the Holy Spirit produces the different charisms: *And he granted that certain ones be apostles and certain ones be prophets, others evangelists, and still others pastors and teachers for the perfection of the holy ones* (1 Cor 12:28), and so on. I want you to distinguish for me in these different names what is the distinctive character of the functions or charisms of each name, what is proper to the apostles, what to the prophets, to the evangelists, to the pastors, and to the teachers. For in all these different names I see that he indicated a similar function and almost the single function of teaching. I, however, think that these prophets whom he listed after the apostles were not those who came before the apostles in the order of time, but those to whom there was given by grace in the time of the apostles either the interpretation of the scriptures and the discernment of spirits or the prediction of the future. For example, Agabus, who predicted an imminent famine,<sup>29</sup> also foresaw the sufferings that blessed Paul would face in Jerusalem and recounted them in words and indicated them by the symbol of his belt.<sup>30</sup> I especially want to know the difference between pastors and teachers because each of these names is often given to the heads of churches.

10. So too he says to Timothy, *I beg, therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all human beings* (1 Tm 2:1). Please explain to me what difference there is in this list of different terms, for it seems to me that everything that he said that we should do fits under the duty of prayer.

11. Likewise, I ask and beg that you explain to me what he says to the Romans, for I confess that I am very blind regarding this statement of the apostle concerning the Jews. He says, *In terms of the gospel they have indeed become enemies on your account, but in terms of the election they are most dear on*

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27. See Mt 15:26.

28. See Eph 4:11-12.

29. See Acts 11:28.

30. See Acts 21:10-11.

*account of the patriarchs* (Rom 11:28). How are the same people enemies on account of us who have come to believe from the Gentiles, as if the Gentiles could not have believed unless the Jews had not believed? Or how was God, the one creator of all, who *wills that all human beings be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth* (1 Tm 2:4), incapable of acquiring both peoples without having one instead of the other? Then, *they are most dear on account of the patriarchs*. How or why are they most dear if they do not believe and if they continue to be enemies of God? Scripture says, *Did I not hate those who hated you, O God, and did I not waste away over your enemies? I hated them with a perfect hatred* (Ps 139:20-21). I certainly think that the Father's voice speaks to the Son through the prophet in the same psalm where he had said above about those who believe, *But I hold your friends in highest honor, O God; their power has been strengthened very much* (Ps 139:17). But what good does it do them for salvation if they are very dear to God on account of the patriarchs, when salvation is attained only by the faith and grace of Christ? What good is it if they are loved when it is necessary that they be damned because they are enemies of the gospel of Christ, since on account of their unbelief they dissent from the faith of their parents, the prophets and the patriarchs? If, then, they are most dear to God, how will they perish? And if they do not believe, how will they not perish? If they are loved on account of the patriarchs without any merit of their own, how will they not also be saved on account of the patriarchs? But even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were among them, they will not save the unbelieving children, but they will themselves alone be saved.<sup>31</sup>

12. Rescue for me from the depths still another rather obscure passage, and bring it into the shallows. In the Letter to the Colossians I cannot at all understand what he says: *Let no one mislead you, insisting on humility and the cult of the angels, walking in a way he has not seen, puffed up without reason in his sensuous mind, and not holding onto the head* (Col 2:18). About which angels is he speaking? If about the hostile and evil ones, what cult do they have? Or what humility? And who is the teacher of this error who, under the pretext of some cult of the angels, teaches what he has not seen as if he had seen and discovered it? Undoubtedly they are heretics who follow and foster the teachings of the demons with various ideas thought up by their mind, framing for themselves images that they have not seen as if they had and by their pestilential arguments sowing them in hearts wrongly inclined to believe.<sup>32</sup> These are people who do not hold onto the Head, that is, Christ, the fountain of truth, and whatever is opposed to his teaching is insane. These are the blind leaders of the blind,<sup>33</sup> of whom I believe it is said, *They have abandoned me, the fountain of living water,*

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31. See Ez 14:14.16.

32. See 1 Tm 4:1-2.

33. See Mt 15:14.



and they have dug for themselves broken cisterns, which do not hold water (Jer 3:13).

13. Then in the next chapter the apostle adds, "*Do not touch.*" "*Do not taste.*" "*Do not handle.*" *All those things are destined for destruction by their use based on the precepts and teachings of human beings. They, of course, have a foundation in wisdom with their superstition and humility and in their harsh treatment of the body, but they have no value for the satiety of the flesh* (Col 2:21-23). What are these things that the teacher of truth testifies have a foundation in wisdom, though he denies that they have the truth of religion? Does he perhaps speak of those things of which he says to Timothy, *But having the appearance of piety, they deny its power* (2 Tm 3:5). I ask especially that you clarify for me word by word these two passages from the Letter to the Colossians because he mixed detestable things up with praiseworthy ones. For what is so praiseworthy as a foundation in wisdom, and what is as detestable as the superstition of error? Humility, which is also pleasing to God and is praiseworthy, especially in the true religion, is attributed along with a foundation in wisdom to those concerning whose teachings and actions we are told, "*Do not touch.*" "*Do not taste.*" *Those things are destined for destruction* (Col 3:21), for they are not from God, and everything which is not from faith is sin.<sup>34</sup> God, however, has scattered the plans of the wise,<sup>35</sup> for they are foolish in the eyes of God on account of the wisdom of the flesh, which cannot be subject to the law of God.<sup>36</sup> For he knows that the thoughts of human beings are vain.<sup>37</sup> I ask what sort of humility and what sort of foundation in wisdom is present in superstition coming from the teachings of human beings. And he says, *In their harsh treatment of the body, but they have no value for satiety of the flesh* (Col 2:21-23). I, of course, do not understand this well enough because there seems to me to be a big discrepancy in the same sentence. For I suspect that he says, *In harsh treatment of the body*, about some pretended or useless abstinence of the sort that heretics often pretend to practice. But he adds, *They have no value*, because in producing the form of a holy work, but without the true faith, they do without the value or fruit of glory what they carry out in the grave fault of a perverse error, as they transform themselves into ministers of righteousness.<sup>38</sup> But his addition, *For the satiety of the flesh*, seems to me to be contrary to his words, *In harsh treatment of the body*. For one who subdues the flesh by fasting seems to me to treat the body harshly, as the apostle says, *I bruise my body and subject it to servitude* (1 Cor 9:27). Satiety of the flesh is alien to that work, unless he perhaps meant by harsh

34. See Rom 14:23.

35. See Ps 33:10.

36. See Rom 8:7.

37. See Ps 94:11.

38. See 2 Cor 11:15.

treatment of the body the very concern about satisfying the flesh, which is blameworthy, especially in those who pretend to practice religion according to the precepts of morality. He says this elsewhere, namely, that each should know how to possess his vessel in an honorable fashion<sup>39</sup> in order that he may present his own body to God as a living sacrifice pleasing to God,<sup>40</sup> not in the satiety of the flesh because a distention of the body kills the sobriety of the soul and is an enemy to chastity.

3. 14. There remains that I suggest to Your Beatitude some passages from the gospels, not, of course, as many as usually occur to one reading them in leisure. For not even now do I have time to seek them, scattered, as they are, through the books, or to bring them into memory by recalling them. Rather I shall ask just a few questions that come to mind at the time of this dictation. Concerning the form of the resurrection you had written a letter, not a large one, but one full of instruction in the faith,<sup>41</sup> in reply to my having consulted you for the second time, when I was spending the winter in Carthage. If you have a copy in your files, I ask you to send it, or at least redo it for me, something that is easy for you. For, even if a written version is not extant, because you perhaps did not want to have a short letter among your books as causing too much disorder, write it anew for me, drawn with the same content from the storehouse of your heart, and send it to me among the other replies that, I hope, you will give me, as Christ offers to me and to you sufficient time. In that way I may receive those answers, and because of them your labor may bear fruit in me in terms of these chapters of the scriptures about which I have questioned you, who see, as it were, with the eyes of God, in order that I may hear what God says to me in you or from you.

15. I ask, however, that you make this clear for me, namely, how or for what reason after the resurrection the Lord was not recognized and then was recognized first by the women who came to the tomb and afterwards by those two on the road and later by his disciples.<sup>42</sup> After all, he rose in the same body in which he suffered. And how was the shape of the same body not the same as it had been? Or if it was the same, how did those who had known it not recognize it? The fact that he was not recognized by those walking on the road and was revealed to them in the breaking of the bread<sup>43</sup> has, I believe, a symbolic meaning. I want, nonetheless, to hold this as your view, not just as mine.

16. And he said to Mary, *Do not touch me for I have not yet ascended to the Father* (Jn 20:17). If she was not allowed to touch him when he was standing nearby, how was she to touch him when he ascended to the Father, except perhaps by progress in faith and by the ascent of the mind, by which God

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39. See 1 Thes 4:4.

40. See Rom 12:1.

41. See Letter 95, 7.

42. See Mk 16:9-75; Lk 24:16-36; Jn 20:14.

43. See Lk 24:30.

becomes far or near to a human being? But she doubted about Christ, whom she had thought was the gardener. Perhaps, then, she deserved to hear, *Do not touch me*. She was judged unworthy to touch with her hand Christ, whom she had not yet grasped with faith nor understood to be God. For she thought that he was the gardener, though she had a little before heard about him from the angels, *Why are you looking for the living among the dead?* (Lk 24:5). Therefore *do not touch me*, because for you *I have not yet ascended to the Father*, since I still seem to you only a human being. You will touch me afterwards when you come down to recognize me by believing.

17. Explain for me what you think of those words of the most blessed Simeon in order that I may follow your interpretation. When he had come into the temple under the impulse of the Holy Spirit in order to see Christ because of a revelation from God and when he had taken the infant Lord into his arms and blessed him, he said to Mary in these words, *See, he is destined for the fall and the rise of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be contradicted, and a sword will pierce your very soul in order that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed* (Lk 2:34-35). Are we perhaps to believe that he prophesied this about the martyrdom of Mary, which has nowhere been recorded? Or was he speaking about her motherly love, in which, when at the time of the Passion she stood beside the cross, on which he to whom she gave birth was nailed, she was later pierced by the grief of her motherly heart, and did the sword of the cross, which pierced her son according to the flesh as she looked on, pierce her soul? For I see that it was said of Joseph in the psalms, *They humbled his feet in shackles; a blade has passed through his soul* (Ps 105:18), just as Simeon said in the gospel, *And a sword will pierce your very soul*. It does not say, "flesh," but, "soul." In it is found the disposition of love, and the sting of sorrow acts like a sword when one suffers some injury of his flesh, like Joseph. He bore the sufferings of injuries when he was sold as a slave and was bound as someone guilty and put into prison.<sup>44</sup> In the same way Mary's motherly mind certainly drew her to the cross of the Lord, on which she then thought only of the body of her son, and, when she had seen that he was dead, she grieved in human weakness and brought him to be buried, without counting on his resurrection. For the pain of the Passion set before her eyes blinded her faith in the miracle to come. And yet the Lord consoled her as she stood beside his cross. Not afraid with the weakness of someone dying, but having that death in his control, which he was facing willingly, he taught her about the death of the cross with the full power of someone living and with the resoluteness of someone who would rise. He said of the blessed apostle, John, *Woman, behold your son*, and likewise to him as he stood there, *Behold your mother* (Jn 19:26-27). That is, now moving from the human frailty, in which he was born from a woman, through the death on the cross into the eternity of God,

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44. See Gn 37:28 and 39:20.

in order to be in the glory of God the Father, he transferred to a human being the rights of human filial piety and chose the youngest of his disciples in order quite fittingly to give to the virgin apostle his virgin mother. He taught the two of them equally in one sentence, and he left us a model of filial piety when he was concerned about his mother so that, when he left her by his body, he did not leave her in terms of his care. But he was not going to leave her even by his body, because she would soon see restored to life him whom she saw dying. And making known by those words that which would pertain to the faith of all, the saving sacrament of his love in the hidden plan of divine providence, he gave his mother to another to have as a mother and to be consoled in turn, and he handed over—in fact, if I may say this—he begot for her in turn a new son in place of his body, to show that besides himself, who was born from that virgin, she neither had nor has a son, because not even the savior would have had such great care for her consolation if he had not been her only son.

18. But let us return to the words of Simeon; I confess that my mind fogs over at the very end of them. He says, *A sword (or a spear) will pierce your soul in order that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed* (Lk 2:35). In its literal sense this is very obscure to me, because we never read that the most blessed Mary was ever killed so that this holy man might seem to have foretold her future suffering from a bodily sword. But he also adds, *In order that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed*. For the psalmist says, *God searches hearts and loins* (Ps 8:10). And concerning the coming judgment the apostle says that *God will then reveal the secrets of hearts and what is hidden in the darkness* (1 Cor 4:5). The same apostle, expressing spiritually the heavenly arms by which we ought to be armed in our inner self, calls the word of God the sword of the spirit. Of it he says to the Hebrews, *The word of God is living and efficacious and more piercing than a two-edged sword, penetrating, he says, even to the division of the soul and the spirit* (Heb 4:12), and you know the rest. Why, then, is it surprising if the burning power of this word and a point more piercing than a two-edged sword pierced the soul first of holy Joseph and then of blessed Mary? For we do not know that a blade entered his or her body. And in order that it might be clearer that the prophet used “blade” there for “sword of the word,” he immediately says in the following verse, *The word of the Lord set him on fire* (Ps 105:19). For the word of God is both fire and the sword since God the Word says both of these of himself. After all, he says, *I have come to send fire upon the earth, and what do I will but that it now be kindled?* (Lk 12:49). Likewise he says elsewhere, *I have not come to bring peace but the sword* (Mt 10:34). You see that he referred to the single power of his teaching by the different terms “fire” and “sword.” Or how could suffering and tribulation be inflicted upon Mary by the sword? And so, I want to know this, namely, how it pertained to Mary that the thoughts of many hearts would be revealed or where it was clearly seen that, because a sword, whether of iron for the flesh or of the word of God for the spirit,

pierced her soul, the thoughts of many hearts were revealed. Explain, then, for me especially this last part of the words of Simeon, for I do not doubt that it is clear to your holy soul, which has by the purity of its interior merited to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit. May God take pity on me because of your prayers, and may he make his face shine over me<sup>45</sup> through the lamp of your word, my holy lord, most blessed brother of one heart in Christ the Lord, my teacher in the faith of the truth, my protector in the heart of Christ's love.

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45. See Ps 4:7.

## Letter 122

In 410 Augustine wrote to the clergy and people of Hippo. Referring to them as "Your Charity," he apologizes for his absence from them, explaining that he is absent because of services required by his fellow bishops (paragraph 1). He exhorts them to continue their generosity to the poor, even in his absence, since they have been in the habit of obeying the commandment of God, who is never absent, even if Augustine himself is (paragraph 2).

*To his most beloved brothers of the clergy and to all the people, Augustine sends greetings in the Lord.*

1. First of all, I beg Your Charity and I beseech you by Christ that my bodily absence not cause you to be sad. For I think that you have no doubt that I could in no way depart from you in the spirit and in the affection of my heart, though it saddens me perhaps more than you that my weakness cannot suffice to meet all the concerns that are demanded of me by the members of Christ, whom his fear and love compel me to serve. After all, Your Charity knows that I am never absent because of a capricious freedom but because of necessary services, which have often compelled my holy brothers and colleagues to endure labors, even at sea and across the sea. I have always been excused from these, not by a lack of concern of my mind but by the less suitable health of my body. Hence, my dearest brothers and sisters, conduct yourselves, as the apostle says, *so that, whether I come and see you or am absent, I hear concerning you that you stand firm in the one Spirit, working together with one mind for the faith of the gospel* (Phil 1:27). If some temporal problem disturbs you, it ought to admonish you more as to how you ought to think of that life where you may live without any toil, escaping not the bothersome difficulties of a short time but the horrendous pains of eternal fire. For, if you now use such great care, such great attention, and such great labor to avoid incurring some passing torments, how much ought you to be concerned to avoid everlasting misery! And if death, which ends our temporal labor, is feared in such a way, how ought we to fear the death that sends us into eternal pain! And if the delights of this world, brief and filthy as they are, are loved in such a way, how much more intensely ought we to seek the pure and endless joys of the world to come! Bear these ideas in mind and do not be remiss in good works, in order that you may come to the harvest of the seed you have sown in its proper time.

2. The report has, after all, reached me that you have forgotten your custom of clothing the poor. When I was present, I exhorted you to this act of mercy, and I now exhort you in order that the affliction of this world may not overwhelm you and make you remiss, for you see that there is happening to this world the sort of

things that our Lord and Redeemer, who cannot lie, foretold would come about. You ought not only not to do works of mercy less, therefore, but you ought to do them even more than you usually do. For just as those who see that the collapse of the house is imminent when the walls are smashed move with greater speed to more protected places, so, the more the hearts of Christians feel that the end of this world is imminent because of increasing tribulations, the more they ought to transfer with a lively swiftness the goods that they were planning to bury in the earth into the heavenly storehouse. In that way, if any human mishap occurs, he who has moved out of the ruined place may rejoice, but if nothing of the sort occurs, he will not be saddened if, since he is destined to die at some time, he has entrusted his own goods to the immortal God to whom he will come.

And so, brothers and sisters, from that which each of you has, in accord with your resources, which each of you knows, do what you usually do with a more eager spirit than usual, and amid all the troubles of this world retain the exhortation of the apostle in your heart. He says, *The Lord is near; do not be concerned over anything* (Phil 4:6). May such things be reported to me concerning you so that I may know from them that you are accustomed to do—not on account of my presence, but on account of the commandment of God, who is never absent—what you did for many years when I was present and also at times when I was absent. May the Lord preserve you in peace, my most beloved brothers and sisters; pray for us.

## Letter 123

In the autumn of 410 Jerome wrote to Augustine, reporting to him certain points about the heretics and alluding enigmatically to the actions of a certain dignitary, most likely a dignitary of the Church. The letter lacks the usual salutation.

Many limp with both feet and remain unbowed, even when their necks are broken, since they maintain a love for their former error, though they do not have the freedom to preach it. The holy brothers and sisters who are with our humble self, especially your holy and venerable daughters,<sup>1</sup> humbly greet you. I ask Your Reverence to greet in my name your brothers, my lords, Alypius and Evodius.<sup>2</sup> Jerusalem is held captive by Nebuchadnezzar and does not want to listen even to the counsels of Jeremiah.<sup>3</sup> On the contrary, she rather longs for Egypt in order that she may die in Taphnes and may perish there in everlasting servitude.

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1. That is, Paula and her daughter, Eustochium, Roman noble ladies, who had retired to Bethlehem.
  2. Alypius and Evodius, lifelong friends of Augustine, were bishops of Thagaste and Uzalis, respectively.
  3. It is not clear to whom Jerome was referring. Some, such as Goldbacher, suggest that he was referring to Alaric, who had captured Rome in 410 and was planning a further expedition to Sicily and Egypt. Others see here a reference to Praylos, the bishop of Jerusalem, who was still secretly and indirectly favoring the Origenists. Still others think Jerome is referring to Pope Zosimus, who favored the Pelagian position, though the letter, if written in 410, is too early for that possibility.



## Letter 124

In 410 or 411 Augustine wrote to Albina, the mother of Melania, the younger, to Melania herself, and to Pinian, Melania's husband. Albina was the wealthy widow of Valerius Publicola, who had died in 408 and to whom Augustine addressed Letter 47. Pinian and Melania had two children who died in childhood; they then resolved to live lives of chastity and continence and gave much of their wealth to charitable purposes. The three members of the nobility had fled from Rome before its sack by Alaric in August of 410. They had settled in Thagaste where their friend, Alypius, was bishop, and they had invited Augustine to visit them. In 417 they left Africa for Jerusalem where they soon met Pelagius. Augustine wrote for them *The Grace of Christ and Original Sin*, after they had written to Augustine that they thought that Pelagius was finally holding the correct view on grace.

In this letter Augustine explains that the rigors of winter have kept him from accepting their invitation and visiting them in Thagaste (paragraph 1) and that the needs of the people of Hippo also do not allow him to leave them (paragraph 2).

*To Albina, Pinian, and Melania, his lord and ladies remarkable in the Lord, his brother and sisters most dear and lovable for holiness, Augustine sends greetings in the Lord.*

1. Though by the condition of my health or by natural temperament I cannot endure cold, I could never have suffered greater anguish than in this horrible winter because I was unable, I shall not say, to travel, but to fly to you, to whom one ought to fly across seas, now that you have taken up residence so near, having come from so far for the sake of seeing us. And perhaps you holy people have thought that the same wintery harshness was the only cause of my suffering. Heaven forbid! For what burden or trouble or even danger do these rains have that I would not endure and bear in order to visit you? For you are such great comforts amid our great woes and are in this twisted and perverse generation lights most ardently alight from the highest light, lights sublime because of the lowly status you have taken on and brighter because of the brilliance you have scorned. I would also relish so spiritual a joy as my bodily homeland,<sup>1</sup> which has even merited to have you present. For when my homeland heard concerning you, when you were absent, what you are by birth and what you have become by the grace of Christ, though it believed this out of love, it nonetheless perhaps feared to tell of it for fear that it would not be believed.

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1. The addressees were residing in Thagaste where Augustine was born and his friend, Alypius, was now bishop.

2. I shall, therefore, state why I have not come and what evils have kept me from so great a good, in order that I may merit not only pardon from you but also, by your prayers, mercy from him who is bringing it about in you that you live for him. The people of Hippo, to whom the Lord gave me as a servant, are to a large extent and almost in every way so weak that, under pressure from even a rather slight tribulation, they could become gravely ill, and they are now stricken by so great a tribulation that, even if they were not weak, they would hardly bear up under it with some good health of their soul. When, however, I recently returned, I found the people scandalized over my absence to their very grave peril. Thanks to your sound words, of course—for we rejoice in the Lord over your spiritual strength—the people of Hippo understand the words of scripture: *Who is weak and I am not weak? Who is scandalized and I do not burn?* (2 Cor 11:29). They are especially afflicted because there are many here who, by disparaging us, try to rile up against us the minds of others by whom we seem to be loved in order that they make a place for the devil in them. But when they, for whose salvation we are making every effort, are angry at us, their great plan for getting even is their desire to die, not in the body, but in the heart, where the corpse is, though hidden, perceived by its stink before it is noticed by our thought. You will surely pardon this concern of mine, especially because, if you were angry and wanted to take vengeance, you would perhaps find nothing worse than what I am suffering when I do not see you at Thagaste. But I hope that, helped by your prayers, I may be allowed as soon as possible to come to you wherever you might be in Africa, once this trouble by which I am now detained has passed, at least if this city in which we labor is not worthy—and I do not dare to think it worthy either—to rejoice with us over your presence.

## Letter 125

In the spring of 411 Augustine wrote to Alypius, the bishop of Thagaste. The people of Hippo had hurled insults at Alypius because they suspected that he was trying to take from them the wealthy layman, Pinian, whom they wanted as a priest. Augustine tells his friend that bishops should strive to remove such suspicions of greed rather than to blame the people (paragraph 1). So too, Augustine explains that he ought not to be angry at Albina, Pinian's mother, and her children, because they suspect him of similar greed, but must rather heal their suspicions by good example (paragraph 2). There is no need for Alypius and Augustine to discuss whether perjury is ever permitted in the scriptures; Pinian's oath to remain in Hippo has full force (paragraph 3). Augustine explains that one commits perjury when he does not live up to the expectation of the person to whom he swore the oath rather than when one merely complies with the words of the oath he swore (paragraph 4). Finally, Augustine tells Alypius that only one of his monks, and he a Carthaginian, had joined the people in the shouting when the people were demanding to keep Pinian as their priest, but he had not joined them in hurling abuse at Alypius (paragraph 5).

*To my most blessed lord and venerably most dear brother and fellow priest, Alypius, and to the brothers who are with you, Augustine and the brothers who are with me send greetings in the Lord.*

1. We, of course, are deeply sorry, and we cannot possibly consider it a slight matter that the people of Hippo shouted such things to the offense of Your Holiness. But one must be much more deeply sorry, my good brother, that people think such things than that they shout them. For, when we are believed to want to keep servants of God out of a desire for money, not out of a love of righteousness, ought we not to wish that those who believe this testify aloud to what is hidden in their heart and that some proportionately greater remedies may be sought, if possible, rather than that they should perish in silence, poisoned by such deadly suspicions? Hence, we should do everything possible on this matter, about which we spoke even before this happened, namely, how we should convince people, to whom we are commanded to offer ourselves as an example of good works, that what they suspect is false rather than how we should rebuke those who state their suspicions in words they shout.

2. Secondly, I myself am not angry at the holy Albina, nor do I judge that she should be rebuked but rather healed of such a suspicion. She did not direct the same words against my person but seemingly complained about the people of Hippo that they revealed their greed insofar as they wanted to keep a wealthy man, one who scorns such money and gives it away, among themselves, not because of his clerical state but because of money. But she all but shouted, none-

theless, what she thought about us, and not she alone but also her holy children, who said this to us on the same day in the choir. I think that these people, as I said, need to be healed of these suspicions rather than rebuked for them. After all, where can we procure or find security and peace from these thorns, if they can sprout up in persons who are so holy and so very dear to our hearts? The ignorant masses, of course, think this of you, while the bright lights of the Church think this of us. I, however, think that we should not bring accusations against either of them but should heal them both. For they are human beings, and concerning human beings people have such suspicions that, though false, are not beyond belief. After all, such persons are not so foolish that they believe that the people want their money, especially since they learned by experience that the people of Thagaste accepted none of it, and the people of Hippo did not either. But all this hostility is roused up only against the clergy, especially against the bishops, whose lordly rule is seen to be excessive and who are thought to use and enjoy the possessions of the Church as their owners and lords. My dear Alypius, let us, if at all possible, not set a bad example for the weak by this greed that is so harmful and deadly. Recall what we said before this temptation had arisen, which pushes us more in this direction. With the help of the Lord let us from now on use foresight by discussing the matter, and let our good conscience not be enough for us, because this is not the sort of situation in which our conscience alone should be enough. For, if we are not bad servants of God, if there burns in us a little of that fire by which *love does not seek its own interests* (1 Cor 13:5), we certainly ought to exercise foresight for what is good not only in the eyes of God but also in the eyes of human beings, so that, while drinking clear waters in our conscience, we are not proven guilty of acting carelessly with our feet with the result that the Lord's sheep drink muddied waters.<sup>1</sup>

3. With regard to what you wrote, that is, that we should inquire among ourselves regarding the sort of oath that is extorted with violence, I beg you that our discussion may not obfuscate matters that are perfectly clear. For, if a servant of God were threatened with certain death so that he would swear to do something forbidden and wicked, he ought to have preferred to die rather than to swear. Otherwise he would fulfill the oath by means of a crime. But now there are only the very persistent shouts of the people, and they would not force that man to any evil but to what, if it were done, would be licit. And there is fear that certain wicked persons, who are generally also mingled with the multitude of the good people, might find the opportunity for unrest and for seemingly just indignation and might erupt into criminal violence out of greed, and yet the object of this fear is uncertain. In that case, who would judge that he ought to commit certain perjury in order to avoid, I do not say, uncertain losses and any bodily

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1. See 2 Cor 8:21 and Prv 3:4.

injuries, but death itself? That famous Regulus,<sup>2</sup> whoever he was, had heard nothing in the scriptures about the wickedness of a false oath, nothing of the scythe of Zechariah,<sup>3</sup> and he, of course, had not sworn to the Carthaginians by the sacraments of Christ but by the impurity of the demons, and yet he did not fear the most certain tortures and the example of a horrible death so that he swore an oath and claimed that he was constrained by necessity. Rather, because he swore with free will, he accepted torture and death in order that he might not commit perjury. And the judgment of Rome at that time refused to have, not in the number of the saints but in the number of the senators, not in heavenly glory but in any earthly court, not only those soldiers who most clearly preferred to commit perjury out of a fear of death and cruel punishments rather than to return to the cruel enemy but even that man who thought that he was acquitted of the crime of perjury because after his oath he returned under the pretext of some necessity.<sup>4</sup> Thus those who expelled him from the senate did not look to what he had in mind when he swore the oath but to what they to whom he swore the oath expected of him. And they did not read what we often sing: *Who swears to his neighbor and does not deceive* (Ps 15:4). We often praise these actions with great admiration, even in persons apart from Christ's grace and name, and we still suppose that we must inquire in the books of God whether we are at times permitted to commit perjury, where we are even commanded not to swear for fear that we might slip into perjury from the habit of swearing!

4. I certainly do not question that it is perfectly correct to say that the promise of an oath is fulfilled not according to the words of the person swearing the oath but according to the expectation of the person to whom the oath is sworn and which the person who swears the oath knows. For it is only with great difficulty that words, especially when they are only a few, can express the meaning of the person whose belief is demanded by the one swearing. For this reason they are perjurers who, even if they fulfill their words, fail to meet the expectation of those to whom the oath was sworn, and they are not perjurers who, though they do not fulfill their words, do, nonetheless, carry out what was expected of them when they swore the oath. Hence, because the citizens of Hippo wanted to have Pinian not as someone condemned to be an inhabitant of their city but as

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2. Marcus Atilius Regulus was an heroic Roman general captured by the Carthaginians during the First Punic War (264-241). He was released and allowed to return to Rome to negotiate peace after he gave his word that he would return to Carthage; he did return and was tortured and killed. See Cicero, *Duties (De officiis)* I, 39-40, as well as Augustine, *The City of God* I, 18.

3. See *Zec* 5:2 LXX.

4. A Roman prisoner of Hannibal was allowed to travel to Rome to negotiate peace or an exchange of prisoners after having sworn to return to the camp. He left the Carthaginian camp and immediately returned, claiming that he had forgotten something. On that basis he claimed that he had fulfilled the terms of his oath and subsequently remained in Rome. See Cicero, *Duties (De officiis)* I, 40 and III, 113. In the first passage Cicero comments, "In an oath you must always bear in mind what you thought, not what you said."

someone most dear, even if his words could not express this clearly enough, it was, nonetheless, obvious what they expected of him. Hence, the fact that now after his oath he is absent ought to disturb none of them who were able to hear that he was going to depart for a specific reason with the intention of returning. And for this reason he will not be a perjurer, nor will he be thought to be one unless he fails to meet their expectation. But he will not fail to do so unless he has either changed his resolve of dwelling with them or leaves at some point without the intention of returning. God keep this from his conduct and the good faith that he observes as something owed to Christ and the Church. For, to omit what you know as well as I, namely, how terrifying is God's judgment concerning perjury, I certainly know that we ought not to become angry hereafter at anyone who does not believe us when we swear an oath, if we think that we should not only calmly tolerate but even defend the perjury of such a man. May the mercy of him who rescues from temptation those who trust in him<sup>5</sup> keep this both from us and from him. As, then, you replied in your memorandum, let him fulfill the promise by which he promised that he would not leave Hippo, just as I or the people of Hippo do not leave, who, nonetheless, have the opportunity of freely both leaving and coming back, with the sole difference that those of us who are not bound by an oath have the full power of both leaving and not returning without the sin of perjury.

5. I certainly do not know whether it can be proved that our clerics or brothers living in the monastery took part in or encouraged the insults against you. For, when I inquired into this, I was told that only one Carthaginian from the monastery had joined in the shouting with the people when they were asking for that man as a priest, not when they hurled insults at you. I joined to this letter a copy of his declaration transcribed from the very page that he had signed and corrected under my supervision.

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5. See Ps 18:30 and 2 Pt 2:9.

## Letter 126

In the spring of 411 Augustine wrote to Albina, the mother-in-law of Pinian, in order to explain to her what had transpired during Pinian's visit to Hippo in an effort to dispel the suspicions of the wealthy widow that the people of Hippo and their bishop were after the money of her family and had for that reason tried to retain Pinian in Hippo (paragraph 1). Augustine explains how he refused to ordain Pinian against his will, despite the demands of the people of Hippo (paragraph 2). Pinian, moreover, swore an oath that he would leave Africa if he were ordained against his will, but added to the oath his promise to remain in Hippo (paragraph 3). Pinian then sought to qualify his oath to remain in Hippo so that he could leave under pressure of some necessity, but eventually dropped any such qualification (paragraph 4). The people demanded that Pinian and the bishops sign his oath. Pinian did sign it, but Melania objected to the other signatures as if this move would affect the validity of Pinian's oath (paragraph 5). Augustine assures Albina that Pinian did swear to remain in Hippo and that he himself did not extort the oath from Pinian (paragraph 6). The people of Hippo were not acting out of a greedy love for money (paragraph 7). Albina's accusation, then, falls upon the clergy and bishops, and Augustine calls upon God as witness that he is not guilty of desiring their money (paragraph 8). Augustine swears that he exercises the administration of church property only in the service of the brothers (paragraph 9). Augustine, moreover, asks that Albina cease to make such accusations of greed against the people of Hippo (paragraph 10). But regardless of the conditions under which he swore the oath, Pinian is obligated to fulfill it; if he does not, he will be guilty of perjury (paragraphs 11 and 12). The people of Hippo demand only that Pinian remain with them, and Augustine urges him to keep his promise (paragraphs 13 and 14).

*To his holy lady and venerable servant of God, Albina, Augustine sends greetings in the Lord.*

1. It is right that we should soothe, not increase the sorrow of your mind, a sorrow which you write you cannot explain. We should do this, in order to heal, if possible, your suspicions, not in order further to disturb by them your venerable heart, which is dedicated to God, by making you angry at us. No threat of death has been launched against our holy brother, your son, Pinian, by the people of Hippo, even if he has perhaps had some such fear. For even we were afraid that some criminals, who are often mingled with a crowd in a secret conspiracy, might produce a violent disturbance because they found an occasion for a rebellion that they might stir up on the pretext of righteous indignation. But, as we were able to hear later, no one said or did anything of the sort. They, however, did in fact shout many slanderous and abusive things against my brother, Alypius. May they deserve to be forgiven this great sin through his prayers! After their first shouts I spoke to them about not ordaining Pinian against his

will—a promise by which I was bound—and added that, if they had him as a priest through the violation of my word, they would not have me as bishop, and then I returned to my seat, leaving the crowd behind. At that point they hesitated and were somewhat disturbed at my unexpected response, like a flame battered down a little by the wind; then they began to be much more ardently riled up, thinking that it was possible either that they might force me to break that promise or that they might get another bishop to ordain him while I kept my promise. I said to those I could, the more respected and dignified men who came up to the choir, that I could not be shaken from fidelity to my promise and that another bishop could not ordain him in a church entrusted to me unless I was asked and permitted it. And if I permitted it, I would still be breaking my promise. I also added that, if he were ordained against his will, they were choosing nothing but that he should leave once he was ordained. They did not believe that this was possible. But the crowd gathered before the steps persisted in the same desire with a frightful and most insistent outburst of shouting and made them unsure of their intention and plan. At that point they shouted those disgraceful things against my brother,<sup>1</sup> and we had graver fears.

2. But, though I was upset by so great a disturbance of the people and so great a disruption of the church, I would not have said to those crowding around anything else than that I could not ordain him against his will. Still, because I had promised that I would not do this, I was not induced in this way to persuade him to accept the priesthood. If I could have persuaded him to do this, I would then not be ordaining him against his will. I kept both promises, not only that one which I had already disclosed to the people, but also the other one to which I was bound by only one witness, if one counts only human beings. In the face of such great danger I have, I say, kept my promise, not my oath. Although, as we later found out, the threat had no basis, danger would have been a threat to everyone in common, if it were real. The fear itself was common to all, and I was thinking of leaving since I was especially afraid on account of the church in which we were gathered. But there was reason to fear that in my absence less reverence on the part of the people and sharper pain might incline them more toward doing something of the sort. Finally, if I left with my brother, Alpius, through the surrounding crowd, we had to worry about anyone's daring to lay a hand on him. If, however, I left without him, what semblance of a good name would I have if something perhaps happened to him and I was thought to have abandoned him in order to hand him over to the rage of the people?

3. Amid this turmoil and deep sorrow of mine, when I was without a breath of a plan, our holy son, Pinian, you see, suddenly and unexpectedly sent to me a servant of God to say to me that he wanted to swear to the people that, if he were ordained against his will, he would definitely leave Africa. I believe that he

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1. That is, Alpius.



thought that, since he could not violate his oath, they would no longer shout with their useless persistence, driving away this man, whom we ought at least to have as a neighbor. Because, however, I thought that there was reason to fear that their sorrow would be more intense after this oath, I remained silent, and since Pinian had at the same time asked that I come to him, I did not delay to do so. After he had told me this, he immediately added to that same oath what he had conveyed to me by means of another servant of God while I was on the way to him, that is, concerning his presence in our city if the burden of the priesthood were not imposed upon him against his will. Amid such troubles, I was at this point relieved, as if by a breath of fresh air, and said nothing to him. But I continued on to Brother Alypius at a quicker pace and told him what Pinian said. Alypius, however, trying, I think, to avoid that anything should happen because of him, over which he thought that you would be offended, said, "On this let no one ask my view." When I heard this, I went to the people who were in an uproar, and after silence was restored, I explained the promise that had been made even with the force of an oath. But the people, who had in mind and desired only his being a priest, did not accept what was offered, as I had thought that they would. Rather, grumbling among themselves for some time, they asked that there be added to the same promise and oath that, if he ever chose to consent to entering the clerical state, he would consent only to this in the church of Hippo. I reported this to him; he agreed to it without hesitation. I made it known to them, and they rejoiced. And soon they demanded the oath that he promised.

4. I returned to our son and found him wavering over the choice of words by which that promise made under an oath could be phrased with a view to some pressing needs that might be able to force him to depart. At the same time he revealed his reasons for fearing that a hostile attack would be made that he would have avoided by departing. The holy Melania wanted him to include as a reason the unhealthy climate, but she was reprimanded by his reply. I, however, said that he had advanced a serious reason, and one that should not be ignored, of an urgent necessity that would also compel citizens to move away. If, however, this were said to the people, we would have to fear that we would be thought to be prophets of evil. But if the excuse were made in general terms of necessity, the necessity would only be regarded as fraudulent. We decided, nonetheless, to test the mind of the people on this issue, and we discovered nothing other than we had thought. For, after his words were read out by the deacon and they were all found acceptable, when there was mention of intervening necessity, there was immediately an outburst, and they were displeased at the promise while the outcry increased, and the people thought that we were doing nothing with them but committing a fraud. After our holy son had seen this, he ordered that the mention of necessity be removed from it, and the people again returned to a state of contentment.

5. And though I pleaded weariness, he refused to present himself to the people without me. He said that he had dictated those words that they heard from

the deacon, that he had sworn, and that he would do what he promised, and he immediately repeated everything in the same tenor in which he had dictated it. The people replied, "Thanks be to God," and they asked that we add our signatures to the whole document. We dismissed the catechumens, and he immediately signed the document. Then they began to ask me, their bishop, to sign it as well, not by shouts of the people, but by the people, nonetheless, by means of good members of the faithful. But when I began to sign it, the holy Melania opposed this. I was surprised at why she did this so late, as if we could have rendered void that promise and oath by not signing it. But I, nonetheless, went along with her wish, and thus it remained without all the signatures, nor did anyone think that he should insist further with us to sign it.

6. I have, however, taken care to convey to Your Holiness by a memorandum to the extent that I considered sufficient what were the feelings and comments of people on the next day when they learned that Pinian had left. Whoever, therefore, may have given you reports contrary to these that I have given you is either a liar or mistaken. I know that I omitted certain points that I thought were none of our concern, but I have, nonetheless, said nothing false. Hence, it is true that our holy son, Pinian, swore an oath in my presence and with my permission, but it is false that he swore the oath under orders from me. He himself knows this as well as the servants of God whom he sent to me, first of all, the holy Barnabas, then Timasius, by whom he also shared with me the promise of his presence here. By their shouting, the people too were urging him to accept the priesthood, not to swear an oath. But when it was offered to them, they did not refuse it in the hope that the desire could be produced in him if he were dwelling among us so that he would agree to ordination. For they feared he would depart, as he had sworn, if he were ordained against his will. And for this reason and on account of the work of God—for the consecration of a priest is the work of God—the people of Hippo began to shout aloud, and since afterwards they were content only if it was added that, if he ever agreed to enter the clerical state, he would agree to this only in the church of Hippo, it is quite evident what they hoped for from his living with them, and, hence, they had not withdrawn from that desire for the work of God.

7. How, then, can you say that they did this out of a shameful love of money? First of all, the money does not at all belong to the people who were doing the shouting. For, just as the people of Thagaste have only their joy over your good work, so this is all the people of Hippo have or the people of any other place where you have carried out the Lord's commands concerning the mammon of iniquity<sup>2</sup> or wherever you are going to do so. In their most ardent demands to provide for the good of their church by means of so great a man, the people, therefore, did not seek their own monetary advantage but loved in you your contempt for money. For they loved in me the fact that they heard that I had

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2. See Lk 16:9-11.

placed no value on the few small fields left to me by my father and devoted myself freely to the service of the Lord, and they did not begrudge this to the church of Thagaste, which is my homeland according to the flesh. For, though that church had not imposed the priesthood upon me when they could have, they took over the possession of that property. If this is so, how much more ardently were they able to love in Pinian that he had overcome and trampled on so great a love of this world, such great wealth, and such fair prospects by such a great conversion! I myself, of course, according to the mind of many who compare themselves among themselves, seem not to have renounced riches but to have come into riches. For my inheritance from my father could be scarcely considered a twentieth part in comparison with the estates of the church that I am now thought to own as their lord. But in whatever church, especially in Africa, our Pinian may be, I do not say a priest but a bishop, when compared to his previous wealth, even if he acted with the attitude of a lord, he will be very poor. Christian poverty, therefore, is loved much more clearly and safely in this man in whom it is impossible to imagine any desire for greater wealth. This set afire the hearts of the people; this roused them to that violent and most persistent shouting. Moreover, we should not accuse them of shameful greediness, but we ought rather to tolerate without any accusation that they love, at least in others, a good that they themselves do not have. For even if the destitute and beggars, who were shouting out together, were mixed in with the multitude and hoped for assistance from your awesome abundance, this is still not, I think, a shameful greediness.

8. It remains, then, that this most shameful love of money is aimed as a reproach against the clergy and especially against the bishops. For we are thought to have dominion over the property of the Church and to enjoy its wealth. In the end, whatever we have received from it we either still possess or we have given away, as seemed good. To the people living outside the clerical state or outside the monastery, except for a very few in need, we have given nothing from it. I do not, therefore, say that you ought to have made these charges against us in particular; they nonetheless could have been spoken only against us with some credibility. What, then, shall we do? By what argument can we clear ourselves at least in your eyes, even if we cannot in the eyes of our enemies? This is an affair of the heart; it is within; it is hidden far away from the eyes of human beings; it is known only to God. What, then, remains but to call God, to whom it is known, as my witness? Since, then, you think this of us, you do not recommend—something that is much better and that you thought that you should object to me as blameworthy in your letter—but you absolutely force us to swear, not by threatening us with fear of the death of the flesh, as the people of Hippo were thought to have done, but by threatening us with fear of the death of our reputation, and we certainly ought to prefer our reputation to the life of this flesh on account of the weak to whom we try to offer ourselves as an example of good works in all we do.

9. When you, nonetheless, force us in this way to take an oath, we are not angry, as you are angry at the citizens of Hippo. For as human beings you believe of human beings faults that, though they are not present in us, could, nonetheless, be present in us. This belief is something that should be healed in you, not something that we should accuse. And our reputation ought to be cleared in your eyes if our conscience has been cleared before the Lord. Perhaps he will grant, as my brother, Alypius, and I discussed it before this trial arose, that not only you, who are most dear members of Christ with us, but also our most bitter enemies may know that we are not sullied by any desire for money in the affairs of the church. Until this comes about, if the Lord will grant that it may come about, you see now in the meanwhile that we are doing what we are forced to do so that we do not delay for however short a time the medicine for your heart. God is my witness that I endure but do not love all this management of church property, the lordship over which I am believed to love. I endure it on account of the service that I owe to the love of the brothers and to the fear of God. As a result, I would want to be without those properties, if I could be so without injury to my duty. Nor do I think otherwise concerning to my brother, Alypius, as God is my witness. And yet, because they held another view of him, the people—and what is worse, the people of Hippo—were led to do such injuries to him, and because you who are saints of God and have hearts filled with mercy believe such things about us, though you mention only the people, who have absolutely nothing to do with the accusation of such greediness, you chose to contact and admonish us in order, of course, to correct us. Nor did you do so out of hatred; may God keep that from you. Hence, I ought not to be angry but to be thankful, since you could not have acted with more modesty or with more frankness in raising what you thought of as an objection to a bishop without being insulting but leaving it to be understood through indirectness.

10. Do not be annoyed and consider yourselves to be offended because I thought that I had to take an oath. After all, the apostle did not offend or love those less to whom he said, *We were not in your midst using words of flattery, as you know, or using the occasion for greed, as God is our witness* (1 Thes 2:5). He used them as witnesses, of course, to something evident, but for something hidden whom did he use as a witness save God? If the apostle, then, rightly feared that human ignorance might think something of the sort about him whose labor was evident to all, because it was only in extreme necessity that he took something for his own use from the people to whom he dispensed the grace of Christ, while he earned by his own hands everything else needed for his sustenance, how much more ought we to labor in order that we may be believed who are far from his equal in the merit of holiness and in virtue of the heart and who cannot work with our hands for the sustenance of this life and, if we could, would not be allowed to by the great tasks that I do not think the apostles endured at that time! The accusation of a shameful love of money, therefore, should not here-

after be raised in this case against the Christian people, who are the Church of God. After all, it is more tolerable that the objection be raised against us upon whom a suspicion of this wrongdoing, false but still credible, can fall than against those who it is clear are free from this love and suspicion.

11. It is not permitted that persons of any faith and for much more reason persons of the Christian faith renege on an oath, I do not say to state something to the contrary but even to hesitate about it in any way. I revealed in the plainest terms what I thought about this well enough, as I think, in the letter that I wrote to my brother.<sup>3</sup> Your Holiness wrote to me, "Do I or the people of Hippo judge that one should fulfill an oath that was extorted through violence?" After all, what do you yourself judge? Do you think that, even when certain death is imminent, something that is at that point uselessly feared, a Christian ought to take up the name of the Lord his God in order to deceive and call upon his God to witness a lie? If one is forced by imminent death to use false testimony short of an oath, he certainly ought to fear defiling his life more than bringing it to an end. Opposing and armed battlelines do battle with one another under the perfectly clear threat of death, to be sure, yet when they swear an oath to one another we praise them when they keep faith and rightly despise them when they do not. But in order that they should swear an oath, what did they fear but being killed or captured by the other side? And for this reason, if they do not respect the oath that was extorted by the threat of death or captivity, if they do not keep their word that was given under oath, they are held guilty of the crime of sacrilege and of perjury, for even such men fear to commit perjury more than to kill another person. And we raise the question, as if to debate it, whether an oath must be kept that has been extorted from servants of God, persons outstanding for the gift of holiness, monks rushing to the perfection of Christ's commandments, even to the point of giving away all their possessions!

12. For, I beg you, why is that presence in our city that Pinian promised burdened with the name of exile, deportation, or banishment? I do not think that priesthood is exile. Would our friend have chosen this real exile rather than the exile of the priesthood? God forbid that we should in that way defend a holy man of God and one very dear to us! God forbid, I repeat, that he should be said to have preferred exile to the priesthood or to have preferred perjury to exile! I would say this if in fact we or the people had extorted from him an oath to promise his presence in our city. But now the oath was not extorted, though he denies having made it, but it was accepted when it was offered. And this was done with the hope, as we said, that, as the people believed, through his presence in our city he could come to agree to their desire that he take up the clerical state. Finally, whatever is thought about us or about the people of Hippo, the situation of those who forced him to take an oath is far different from that of those who I

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3. That is, to Alypius in the previous letter.

will not say forced but persuaded him to commit perjury. Pinian himself, whom we are discussing, ought not to refuse to consider whether an oath made out of any sort of fear is worse than perjury apart from any fear.

13. Thanks be to God that the people of Hippo think that the promise made to them is not fulfilled in any other way than by his being present with the intention of staying here and of his going where it is necessary with the intention of returning. For, if they attended to the words of the oath and demanded its fulfillment, then the servant of God ought not to leave under any condition, just as he ought not under any condition to commit perjury. But it would be a crime on their part to detain any man, not just such a man, and they showed that they had no other expectation when they rejoiced over hearing that he was leaving with the intention of returning, nor were they owed anything else by a sincere oath than what they expected from it. But what does it mean when he says that by the oath he expressed from his own mouth he made an exception for a necessity? It is as if he ordered in the second case that the oath be cancelled. At least when he spoke to the people, he could then have inserted this, and if he had done so, they would not have replied, "Thanks be to God," but would have gone back to their shouting that was brought about when it was read out in that way by the deacon. And is it at all relevant whether or not there was inserted an excuse for leaving on the grounds of some necessity? Nothing else was expected of him than what we said above. But whoever does not meet the expectation of those to whom he swore an oath cannot fail to be a perjurer.

14. Let him, therefore, carry out what he promised, and let the hearts of the weak be healed, lest by such a dangerous example those who approve of this may be induced to imitate his perjury, while those who disapprove may say with complete justification that none of us should be believed not only when we promise something but even when we swear an oath. In this, after all, we must beware of the tongues of our enemies, since that more powerful enemy of ours uses them as spears to slay the weak. But God forbid that we should expect from such a holy soul anything else than what the fear of God inspires and what the great excellence of the holiness found in it counsels. But I myself, who you say ought to have forbidden his oath, could not come to such wisdom that I should want the church that I serve to be harmed by such a great rebellion or scandal rather than accept what was offered to us by so fine a man.

## Letter 127

Toward the end of 410 Augustine wrote to Armentarius and Paulina, a Catholic married couple, perhaps in Africa, who had vowed to live together a life of continence. Augustine urges Armentarius to fulfill the vow he has made (paragraph 1). He describes the many sufferings that those who love this present life endure in order to prolong their life for even a short while, though they will eventually lose it (paragraph 2). Moreover, love of this passing life often entails the loss of eternal life (paragraph 3). This world ought rather to be held in contempt in order to obtain life without end (paragraph 4). Augustine urges Armentarius to take up Christ's yoke, which is lightened for its bearers by the love of God that the Holy Spirit pours out in the hearts of the faithful (paragraph 5). In fulfilling the vow they have made, Armentarius and his wife will be offering themselves to God and will not lose themselves by their gift (paragraph 6). He urges them not merely to hear God's words but to put them into practice (paragraph 7). Though it would have been good for them to have children, their vow has eliminated that option (paragraph 8). Since Armentarius' wife has consented to their living a life of continence, he has no choice but to be a man and live up to what they have together vowed (paragraph 9).

*To his distinguished, rightly honorable, and lovable lord and lady, Armentarius and Paulina, Augustine sends greetings in the Lord.*

1. The illustrious man, my son and your relative, Ruforius, reported to me the vow you made to the Lord. I was delighted by his account and at the same time fearful that the tempter, who is the ancient enemy of such good people, might persuade you to do something else. Hence I thought that I ought to exhort Your Charity with a few words, my distinguished, rightly honorable, and lovable son, in order that you might keep in mind what you read in the words of God: *Do not be slow to turn to the Lord, and do not postpone it day after day* (Sir 5:8), and in order that you might start up and take care to pay what you know you vowed to him who demands what is owed him and keeps his promises. For scripture also says: *Make vows to the Lord, and keep them* (Ps 76:12). And yet, even if you had not made a vow, what else ought I to urge you to do or what better act can a man do than to give himself back to his creator, especially since God has manifested and revealed so great a proof of his love for us that he sent his only-begotten Son to die for us?<sup>1</sup> Nothing else, then, remains but that you carry out the words of the apostle, where he says that Christ died *in order that those who live may no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and rose* (2 Cor 5:15). Or is the world still perhaps to be loved, though crushed by so great a downfall that it has lost even its seductive appearance? For, to the extent that those people should be

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1. See 1 Jn 4:9.

praised and acclaimed who chose not to prosper with the world when it was prospering, to that extent they should be rebuked and blamed who take delight in perishing with the world as it perishes.<sup>2</sup>

2. If we endure the labors, dangers, and disasters of this passing life for the sake of this same life, which will at some time end, not in order to banish its death entirely but to delay it a little while, how much more ought we to endure them for eternal life where nature does not carefully avoid death nor cowardice shamefully fear it nor wisdom courageously face it? No one, of course, will face death since it will not exist. Let eternal life, then, have you among her lovers. Do you not see what passionate lovers this miserable and needy life has and how tightly she binds her lovers to her? Her lovers, nonetheless, who are disturbed by the peril of this life, often end it more quickly, and they hasten death in avoiding it because they fear life's end, just as, while fleeing a robber or wild animal, someone might rush into a river to be swept away. They at times throw even food into the sea when a storm is raging, and in order to live they throw away the means to live for fear that the life they live amid labor may quickly be brought to an end. What great labors we endure in order that we may labor longer! And when death begins to be imminent, we shun it so that we may fear it even longer. For amid so many mishaps to human frailty how many deaths we fear, though when one of them comes, there is at least none left to fear. And yet we flee from that one in order that we may fear them all. What pains torment those who are cared for and cut by doctors! And is this in order that they may not die? It is, rather, in order that they may die a little later. We accept many certain torments in order that we may have a few more uncertain days, and at times people are conquered by the pains themselves and die right away, though they had accepted the pain because of the fear of death. And although they certainly do not choose to die in order that they may not suffer but to suffer in order that they may not die, it turns out that they both suffer and die. And this is not only because, after being healed, they, of course, come to the end of their life after their sufferings. And yet the life attained by such pains can be neither everlasting, because it is mortal, nor long, because the whole of it is short, nor secure during its short length, because it is always uncertain. It is also because they at times die by the suffering that they wanted to suffer in order not to die.

3. Too much love for this life also brings with it this great evil that we should deeply deplore and stand in horror of, namely, that, when many want to live a little longer, they seriously offend God in whom is found the source of life,<sup>3</sup> and in that way, while they uselessly fear the end of life, which must come, they are kept away from where there is life without end. In addition, even if this miserable life could be endless, it would in no way be comparable to even the shortest

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2. Augustine is probably alluding to the fall of Rome to Alaric.

3. See Ps 36:10.



happy life. And yet, by loving this most miserable and short life, these people lose the most happy and everlasting life because in this life, which they wrongly love, they want what they lose in the next life. For in this life they certainly do not love its misery, because they want to be happy, nor do they love its shortness, because they do not want it to end; they love it only because it is life, but in such a way that on account of it, though it is miserable and short, they lose life that is happy and everlasting.

4. Once we consider this, does eternal life demand anything great of its lovers when it commands them to love it as this life is loved by its lovers? Or is it proper or even tolerable that, though people scorn everything that they love in the world in order for at least a little longer to hold onto in the world a life soon to be ended, they do not hold in contempt this world in order to obtain life without end with him by whom the world was made? Recently when Rome, the home of the glorious empire, was being sacked by the barbarian invasion,<sup>4</sup> how many lovers of this temporal life gave up all the possessions that they had amassed not only to make this life pleasing and attractive, but to maintain and protect it, in order to prolong this life, even in unhappiness, and to rescue mere life itself! Lovers, of course, often give to those they love many gifts in order to hold onto them, but these lovers of life would not have held onto their beloved if they did not impoverish it by loving it, nor did they give her many gifts but rather took them away in order that the enemy would not take her from them. And I do not blame their decision. After all, who could fail to know that their life would have been lost if those treasures that were hidden on her account were not lost? And yet, some first lost them and soon after their life. But from this we should learn the sort of lovers of eternal life we ought to be so that we hold in contempt all superfluous things on its account, since in defense of this passing life those people held in contempt things that were necessary.

5. Nor shall we, after all, strip bare our beloved in order to hold onto her, as these men did, but in order to attain that eternal life we make this temporal life act as a servant with fewer hindrances if we do not bind her with the chains of vain ornaments and do not weigh her down with the burden of harmful concerns and if we listen to the Lord. For he truthfully promises us that life which we should desire with the greatest ardor when he cries out, as if addressing the whole world: *Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I shall refresh you. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me because I am meek and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light* (Mt 11:28-30). This lesson in pious humility drives from the heart and in a sense spits out that vain and stormy desire that longs for things beyond our control. For we labor when we seek after and love many things for the acquisition and retention of which our will does not suffice, because it does not have the power to get them. But the righteous

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4. Rome fell to Alaric's Goths in August of 410.

life is present when we will it, because to will it fully is righteousness. Nor does the perfection of righteousness require anything more than a perfect will. See whether there is any labor involved where the will is enough. For this reason God said, *Peace on earth to human beings of good will* (Lk 2:14). Where there is peace there is also rest, and where there is rest there is an end to desiring and no reason for laboring. But in order that this will may be perfect, it is necessary that it be in good health, but it will be in good health if it does not flee from the doctor by whose grace alone it can be healed of the disease of harmful desires. He, then, is the doctor who cries out, *Come to me, all you who labor*, and says that his yoke is easy and his burden light. For, when love has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit,<sup>5</sup> we will, of course, love what we are commanded, and his yoke will not be harsh or burdensome if we serve God under this one yoke with our neck more free the less it is swollen with pride. And this is the one burden that does not press down but raises up its bearer. If we love riches, let us store them away where they cannot be lost. If we love honor, let us possess it where no one unworthy is honored. If we love salvation, let us desire its attainment where we will have no fear for it once we have attained it. If we love life, let us gain it where death does not bring it to an end.

6. Give to God, therefore, what you vowed, because that is you yourselves, and you should give yourselves to him from whom you have your being. Give this to God, I beg you. After all, what you give to him will not be lessened by giving it but it will rather be preserved and increased. For he exacts payment generously, not as if in need, and he is not enriched by what we give him but rather enriches those very persons who give to him. What is not, therefore, given to him is lost, but what is given to him is added to the giver. In fact, in him to whom it is given, the giver is preserved. The gift and the giver will in fact be the same because the debt and the debtor were the same. For human beings owe themselves to God, and in order to be happy they must give themselves to him from whom they have received their being. This is what the words of the Lord in the gospel mean: *Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God* (Mt 22:21). For he said this when, after being shown a coin and having asked whose image it had, he received the reply, "Caesar's." He said this in order that they might understand from this that God demands of a human being his own image in the human being, just as Caesar demanded his own image on the coin. How much more, then, ought we to give that image to God when we have promised this, since we owe it to him even if we have not promised it!

7. Hence, my dear friend, would that I could, in keeping with my small talent, more lavishly praise the benefit of your holy plan of life which I discovered that you vowed to God, and could point out the difference between Christians who

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5. See Rom 5:5.

love this world and those who hold it in contempt, though both of these groups are called believers. Both of them have been washed by the bath of the sacred font and initiated and consecrated by the same mysteries, and both of them not merely listen to but also preach the same gospel. But both of them do not, nonetheless, share in the kingdom and the light of God, and both of them are not heirs of eternal life, which is the only happy life. After all, the Lord Jesus did not distinguish between those who hear his words and those who do not hear them, but among those who hear his words, and the distinction was not a fine one but very broad. He said, *Whoever hears my words and puts them into practice, I shall liken to a wise man who built his house upon rock. The rains came down; the rivers rose; the winds blew and struck that house, and it did not collapse. For it was built upon rock. But whoever hears my words and does not put them into practice, I shall liken to a fool who built his house upon sand. The rains came down; the rivers rose; the winds blew and struck that house, and it collapsed. And its ruin was great* (Mt 7:24-27). To hear those words, then, is to build; in this respect both groups are equal. But in putting into practice or not putting into practice what they hear they are as unequal as a building built upon solid rock is unequal to one that, without any foundation, is destroyed by the easy shifting of sand. Nor does one who does not hear his words at all obtain any greater safety for himself. For a person who builds nothing is without any roof and is exposed to the rain, rivers, and winds so that he will be overwhelmed, carried off, and scattered much more easily.

8. I could also, in accord with my limitations, have drawn a distinction among those who belong on the right hand and to the kingdom of heaven, with their various degrees of merit, and I could have shown how the married life of fathers and mothers who procreate children and are, nonetheless, devout and pious differs from that life which you vowed to God, if you now needed to be exhorted to vow that life. But since you have already vowed it to God and have already bound yourself, you may not do anything else. Before you were bound by the vow, you were free to live on a lower level, although one should not rejoice over a freedom because of which one does not have a debt whose payment is a gain. But now that God has your vow, I am not inviting you to a great act of justice; rather, I am deterring you from a great injustice. For, if you do not put into practice what you have vowed, you will not be the same sort of person you would have remained if you had not made any such vow. For in that case you would have been less good, but not worse. But now if you break your promise to God, you will be more wretched—God forbid!—to the extent that you would be happier if you kept it. Do not, therefore, regret that you made the vow; rather, rejoice that you now may not do what you might have done to your own loss. And so, begin without fear, and put your words into action. He will help you who seeks the fulfillment of your vows. Happy is the necessity that forces one to what is better.

9. There could be only one reason why we would not only not exhort but even forbid you to fulfill what you vowed: if your wife refused to undertake this way of life with you out of a weakness of the mind or of the flesh. For married couples should not make such vows except by their common consent and desire, and if the vow was made hastily, one should correct its rashness rather than fulfill its promise. After all, God does not require payment if someone vows what belongs to another, but rather forbids one to take another's property. God's judgment on this matter was, of course, set forth by the apostle: *A wife does not have power over her own body, but her husband does; likewise, a husband does not have power over his own body, but his wife does* (1 Cor 7:4). He referred to sex with the term "body." But since I hear that she is so ready to dedicate her continence to God that she is held back only by the possibility that she might be forced by the law of marriage to pay her debt to you, both of you give to God what both of you have vowed in order that you may pay to God what you do not ask for from each other. If continence is a virtue, as it is, why is the weaker sex more ready for it, though virtue seems rather to have taken its name from "man,"<sup>6</sup> as the likeness of their sounds indicate? As a man, then, do not shrink from a virtue that a woman is ready to practice. Let your consent be an offering on the heavenly altar of the creator, and let concupiscence be conquered more bravely to the extent that the bond of love is more holy. May we rejoice over you in the abundant grace of Christ, my distinguished, rightly honorable, and lovable son and daughter.

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6. See Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* (*Disputationes Tusculanae*) II, 18, 43. "Virtue" is said to be related to "man (*vir*)."

## Letter 128

In May of 411, perhaps on the 25th, Aurelius, the primate of Africa, Silvanus, the primate of Numidia, and their Catholic bishops wrote to Marcellinus, the imperial commissioner sent by the emperor, Honorius, to convoke and preside over a conference between the Catholics and the Donatists. This and the following letter were appended to the Proceedings of the Conference of Carthage that convened on 1 June 411. The bishops state their agreement with the conditions set by Marcellinus (paragraph 1). They further promise that they will not insist upon their retention of the office of bishop if they lose, though they are willing to have the Donatist bishops retain their positions of honor, even if the Donatist side loses (paragraph 2). They also propose ways to exercise their offices as bishops jointly with their Donatist counterparts, if the latter accept unity with the Catholics (paragraph 3). Finally, they recall how the Donatists accepted back into unity the Maximianists who had split away from the Donatists and allowed them to retain their priestly and episcopal dignities (paragraph 4).

*To Marcellinus, their honorable and most beloved son, an illustrious gentleman and excellent tribune and chancellor, Aurelius, Silvanus, and all the Catholic bishops send greetings.*

1. 1. By this letter, as you graciously advised us to do, we convey our assent in all respects to the edict of Your Excellency by which you made provision for the preservation of the peace and quiet of our conference and for the revelation and defense of the truth, that is, concerning the place and time of the conference and concerning the number of those who are to be present. We agree also that those to whom we delegate the duty of partaking in the conference should sign their interventions,<sup>1</sup> and, in that document in which we assign them this duty and promise that we will consider what they do as valid, you will not only have the signatures of all of us but you will also observe those signatures as they are appended. With the help of the Lord, we will also instruct the Christian people that for the sake of peace and quiet they should refrain completely from gathering at the place of the conference and that they should not rush to hear what is being discussed when it is being discussed but should wait for the written proceedings in order to know the results, just as you promised that you would make them public.

2. Confident in the truth, we also bind ourselves by the bond of the following condition: If those with whom we are conferring can prove to us that, though in accord with the promises of God the Christian peoples have already grown and occupied a large part of the world and are waiting to occupy the remaining part,

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1. Marcellinus had directed that each side should choose six advocates who alone could intervene in the discussions with another six bishops for each side as advisors.

the Church of Christ suddenly perished by the infection of the sins of some people or other, whom they accuse, and remains only in the sect of Donatus—if, as we said, they can prove this, we will ask for no honors of the office of bishop among them, but we will for eternal salvation alone follow the counsel of those to whom we shall owe the grace of so great a benefit in having come to the knowledge of the truth. But if, instead, we are able to show that the Church of Christ which now occupies the territories not only of the African but also of the overseas provinces and the wildest areas of many nations by the numbers of its peoples and which, as scripture says, is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world,<sup>2</sup> could not have perished by the sins of any human beings mixed in with her, and if, secondly, we show that the question about those whom they chose at that time to accuse rather than were able to prove guilty has been brought to an end, even though the case of the Church does not rest upon them, and that Caecilian was declared innocent, while those others were declared men of violence and slander by that emperor to whose judgment they of their own accord submitted their charges when they accused them, and, lastly, if they said anything concerning the sins of any persons and we prove by human or divine documents either that their innocence was attacked by false charges or that the Church of Christ, to whose communion we belong, was not destroyed by any sins of theirs, then let them embrace its unity along with us in order that they might not only find the path of salvation but also not lose the honor of the episcopacy. After all, we despise in them not the sacrament of the divine truth but the lies of human error, and, once these lies have been removed, we embrace the heart of brothers united to us by Christian love, a heart that we now mourn because it is separated from us by a diabolical schism.

3. Each one of us could in turn occupy the higher position with his companion in honor, united with him like a visiting bishop seated with him as a colleague. We grant this honor to both of them, alternating between their basilicas and each anticipating the other in showing mutual deference, because when the reception of love has expanded their hearts the possession of peace will not be narrowly confined. As a result, when one of them dies, one bishop will succeed the other according to the ancient custom. Nor will some new practice be introduced. For from the beginning of this division the Catholic love has observed this practice in the case of those who condemned the error of their wicked schism and relished, though so late, the sweetness of unity. Or if perhaps the Christian peoples each prefer their own bishop and cannot because of the strange appearance of the situation tolerate two bishops sharing the governance of one church, let each of them withdraw from the picture. And after the grounds of schism had been condemned in the individual churches that have been established in peaceful unity, let only one bishop be appointed in one church, once unity has

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2. See 1 Col 1:6.

been restored, in the places where it is necessary, by bishops who are each the only bishop in an individual church. After all, why should we hesitate to offer the sacrifice of this humility to our redeemer? Or did he come down from heaven into human members in order that we might become his members, while we are afraid to come down from our episcopal thrones in order that his members might not be torn apart by a cruel division? For our own sake it is quite sufficient that we are faithful and obedient Christians; let us, then, always be this. But we are ordained bishops for the sake of the Christian people; let us, then, do with our episcopacy what contributes to Christian peace for the Christian peoples. If we are useful servants, why do we begrudge eternal gains for the Lord in defense of our temporal dignities? The dignity of a bishop will be more beneficial for us if, when it is surrendered, it gathers together the flock of Christ that it scatters when it is retained. After all, with what effrontery shall we hope for the honor promised us by Christ in the world to come if our honor in this world stands in the way of Christian unity?

4. We have taken care to write these things to Your Excellency in order that you may make them known to all. We ask that with the help of the Lord our God, at whose prompting we are sending this and with whose help we trust that we will carry it out, pious love may either heal or subdue human hearts, whether weak or hard, even before the conference, if possible. And thus with peaceful minds may we not resist the perfectly clear truth, and may we have oneness of heart either before or after our conference. After all, we should not give up hope, if we bear in mind that the peacemakers are blessed because they will be called the children of God,<sup>3</sup> that it will be much more honorable and easy for them to want the sect of Donatus to be reconciled to the whole Christian world than to want the whole Christian world to be rebaptized by the sect of Donatus. After all, in the case of those people returning from the sacrilegious and condemned schism of Maximian, people whom they took care to correct by going after them even by means of the ordinances of earthly powers, they sought them out with such great love that they did not dare to declare invalid the baptism they had administered. And they welcomed back certain ones of them who had been condemned without any lessening of their dignity, but they judged that certain others were not defiled by communion with this schism. We do not begrudge them their harmony with one another, but they ought at least to notice the piety with which the Catholic root seeks with such great zeal after the branch that has been broken off from itself if the branch itself likewise labored so to gather back the small twig cut off from it. [And in another hand:] We pray, my son, that you are well in the Lord. I, Aurelius, the bishop of the Catholic church of Carthage, have signed this letter. [Likewise, in another hand:] I, Silvanus, the primate of the church of Summa, have signed this.

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3. See Mt 5:9.

## Letter 129

Close to 30 May 411, Aurelius, the primate of Africa, Silvanus, the primate of Numidia, and all their bishops, replied to the notice from the Donatists and informed Marcellinus, the imperial commissioner, that they have granted what the Donatists requested, namely, that all their bishops who have come should be present at the site of the conference. They express their hope that the conference will take place in peace, though they state their suspicion that the Donatists are planning a disturbance (paragraph 1). They point out that the Donatists could have seen in the scriptures the predicted spread of the Church throughout the world with the same ease with which they have seen the resurrection of Christ (paragraph 2). They express their hope that the Donatists have discovered in the scriptures the promise of the spread of the Church, though they find nothing there about its survival only in the sect of Donatus (paragraph 3). They review the steps by which Caecilian was acquitted by ecclesiastical courts and by the judgment of the emperor (paragraph 4). They mention the scripture texts that indicate that the presence of sinners in the Church does not corrupt the Church and urge against the Donatists their own conduct with the Maximianists (paragraph 5). The Donatist claim that they want to display their large numbers is undercut by the fact that they have numerical superiority only in Numidia (paragraph 6). Finally, the bishops insist that, if there is a disturbance, it will be due to the Donatists who have insisted on the needless presence of so many bishops at the site of the conference (paragraph 7).

*Aurelius, Silvanus, and all the Catholic bishops send greetings to their honorable and most beloved son, His Excellency, Marcellinus, the honorable tribune and imperial chancellor.*

1. The notice or letter of our brothers whom we desire to be converted from their pernicious schism to the Catholic peace has caused us much worry, because they have refused to agree to the edict of Your Excellency, by which you have procured peace and tranquillity for our conference. We are worried that perhaps not all but some of them might by the uproar and shouting of the crowd interfere with the conference, which should be peaceful and calm. Would that they were not tempted by this idea and that we were mistaken in this suspicion! And so I hope that they all want to be present in order that, after we too have gathered there, as they wanted, we may emerge from the conference together in harmony and at peace and that, with the schismatic division corrected, we may be bound together by the brotherly bond of the unity of Christ to the amazement and joy of all good people, while only the devil and his like are saddened. And I hope that we may go into the church as equals to give thanks and praise to God with most ardent and pure love.

2. After all, why should it be difficult, if a calm eye looks on and Christian thought does not falter, to consider and see that, having set aside human accusa-



tions, whether true or false, we should seek the Church in those writings in which Christ, her redeemer, became known to us? For just as we do not listen to those who say against Christ that his disciples stole his body from the tomb, neither should we listen to those who say against his Church that it exists only in Africa and only in a few Africans. The apostle, of course, says that true Christians are members of Christ.<sup>1</sup> Just as, then, we do not believe that the dead flesh of Christ disappeared from the tomb by anyone's thievery, neither should we believe that his living members disappeared from the world by anyone's sin. Because, then, Christ is the head and the Church is his body, it is not difficult to see that in the gospel the head is defended against the slanders of the Jews and that at the same time the body is defended against the accusations of heretics. For the words we read, *It was necessary that Christ suffer and rise from the dead on the third day* (Lk 24:46), are against those who say that the dead body was taken from the tomb. But the following words, *And that repentance and the forgiveness of sins be preached in his name through all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem* (Lk 24:47), are against those who say that the Church is not present in the whole world. In that way by one short passage and with a few words both the enemy of the head and the enemy of the body are driven off and, if they pay faithful attention, are corrected.

3. For we ought to grieve more that our brothers maintain such hostility to the extent that it is clearer that they hold with us the same scriptures that contain these perfectly clear testimonies. The Jews, of course, who deny that Christ rose, at least do not accept the gospel; these brothers of ours, however, are bound by the authority of both testaments, and yet they want to accuse us because of the surrender of the gospel, while they refuse to believe it when it is read out. But now, perhaps, having taken up the concern of this conference, they have examined more carefully the sacred scriptures. And they have perhaps found in them countless passages that promise that the Church will exist in all nations and in the whole world, just as we see in the gospel, in the letters of the apostles, and in the Acts of the Apostles that the promise began to be kept and fulfilled. In them we read of the places, cities, and provinces through which the Church grew, beginning from Jerusalem, so that it also spread to Africa, not by changing place but by growth. But they have not found any testimony of the divine scriptures where it is said that the Church would disappear from the other parts of the world and remain only in Africa in the sect of Donatus. And they saw how absurd it is that so many testimonies of God are read out in favor of that church that was going to disappear, but that no testimony of the Lord is found in favor of that part that, as they think, was going to be pleasing to the Lord. Bearing these thoughts in mind, they perhaps chose to gather at the site of our conference to end the vain, destructive hostility that is opposed to their eternal salvation, not in order that a new disturbance may emerge but that the old discord may be ended.

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1. See Eph 4:25.

4. For we believe that they have finally realized that they should not blame that issue over which they are often very angry with us, namely, that the kings of the earth, of whom it was predicted so long before that they would serve Christ, establish laws against heretics and schismatics on behalf of the Catholic peace. For the kings of old, not merely of the Hebrew people but of other peoples as well, terrified all the peoples of their realm with the most threatening commands in order that no one would not only not do but not even say anything against the God of Israel, that is, the true God. And the predecessors of these heretics referred the case of Caecilian, over which this schism arose, to Emperor Constantine by means of the proconsul, Anulinus, by their accusations. We see, of course, that they did this for no other reason than that Emperor Constantine would by his imperial authority issue a decree against those who lost the case in favor of those who won it. And they could have discovered by examining the public archives—and perhaps they did so due to the needs of the conference—that the whole case was ended back then after the Church hearings by which Caecilian was acquitted when that emperor himself pronounced judgment, to whose judgment they first sent and later brought the whole issue. There they could also have discovered that the case of Felix of Aptungi, who ordained Caecilian and who they had said in their council was the source of all of the evils,<sup>2</sup> was dismissed when the proconsul, Aelian, heard it at the order of the same emperor.

5. And yet, if they paid attention to this and noticed, as was easy to do, that in the holy scriptures it was promised that the Church of Christ would have weeds, straw, and bad fishes mixed in with it up to the time of the harvest,<sup>3</sup> of the winnowing,<sup>4</sup> and of the shore,<sup>5</sup> they could, of course, realize that, even if Caecilian and his fellow bishops were in the wrong, they could not have done any harm to the Christian world, which God promised so long before to a few who believed it and now has brought about for many who see it. Or perhaps in sinning a man can do more against the Church than God can do for the Church by an oath, and perhaps what sinfulness lost is more powerful than what God promised. Perhaps they have already seen how stupid and impious it is to hold these ideas. They perhaps bore in mind that they procured by the use of earthly authorities that the Maximianists, who condemned Primian and whom they condemned, were driven even from their basilicas, and there they learned with more certainty by a more recent example of their own that it is not a sin if the Church asks for something of the sort from such authorities against those who are rebelling against her. And they later received back some from among those who were condemned, though, when they condemned them, they granted a

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2. The Council was held in Carthage in 312 and presided over by Secundus of Tigisi.

3. See Mt 13:24-30.

4. See Mt 3:12.

5. See Mt 13:47-48.

delay to very many others who were in the same schismatic community, and they said that these were not polluted by communion with the sacrilegious vine of Maximian.<sup>6</sup> Nor did they dare to declare invalid or to repeat the baptism administered by those condemned or by their companions, though it was administered outside their sect in a schism. They certainly grasped sufficiently well that those charges that they were bringing against us were denounced by their own example. And we should believe that they now understand how shameful and how intolerable it is that, though there sit upon episcopal seats with these men and with Primian himself both those who condemned him and those who were condemned in his trial, so that the sect of Donatus might have peace, the Christian world is disparaged so that the unity of Christ does not live in peace!

6. Perhaps, if they bore all this in mind and were deeply moved by the fear of God, they all chose to be present at the site of the conference not with a disruptive but with a peaceful disposition. They said, after all, that all of them were present in order that their numbers would be seen, since their opponents often falsely claimed that they were few. If our people have said this at times, they could have said it with perfect truth of these places where the number of our fellow bishops, clerics, and lay people is far greater, especially in Africa Proconsularis. And yet, apart from Numidia Consularis, our numbers easily surpass them even in the other African provinces. Or at least we are absolutely correct to say that they are very few in comparison with all the nations through which the Catholic communion is spread. But now, if they had wanted to reveal their numbers, would they not reveal them in a more orderly and peaceful manner by their signatures, which you ordered them by your edict to affix to their charge? What, then, does it mean that they all want to be present at the site of the conference? For, if they do not have peace in mind, what disturbance will they not cause if they speak, or what will they accomplish there if they are silent? For, even if there is no shouting, the whispering alone of many will make a noise loud enough to interfere with the conference.

7. But why is it that they thought that it should be set forth in your notice that they had rightly demanded that all should be present since all were summoned to come, as if a few could have been chosen who ought to be present? Why was this done, unless it was that all who had come would in your presence add their signature to their election and thus all would be represented by the few since the few had been elected by all? They, therefore, have in mind either a disturbance or peace; of these we hope for the one and take precautions against the other. And so, for fear that they are preparing—God forbid!—that against which we are taking precautions rather than that which we hope for, we agree that they all be

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6. Maximian, a deacon in Carthage, led a schism that broke away from the Donatists and condemned Primian, the Donatist bishop of Carthage. The Maximianists were subsequently accepted back into unity with the Donatists without loss of their bishoprics and without rebaptism.

present provided, nonetheless, that we have a number as large as Your Excellency has thought sufficient. Thus, if some disturbance comes about because of the crowds, it will be correctly ascribed to none but them, on whose side there will be present an absolutely needless multitude for an issue that should be dealt with by a few. But if that multitude is needed for the sake of establishing unity, something that we desire with all our prayers, that we ardently seek, that we humbly beg for from the Lord, we will all be present when they wish, and we will hurriedly rush to so great a good with the help of him who gives it. We will say, *You are our brothers* (Is 66:5 LXX), no longer to those who hate us, but to those who embrace us with the hatred gone in order to bring honor to the name of the Lord and in order that they who are now experiencing it along with us in joyfulness may see how good and pleasant it is that brothers dwell together in unity.<sup>7</sup> [And in another hand:] We pray, my son, that you are prospering in the Lord. [Again in another hand:] I, Aurelius, bishop of the Catholic church of Carthage, have signed this. [Likewise:] I, Silvanus of the first see of Numidia, have signed this.

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7. See Ps 133:1.

## Letter 130

Not much later than 411, Augustine wrote to Proba, a wealthy Roman widow who had taken refuge in Africa with her daughter-in-law, Juliana, and grandniece, the famous Demetrias, after fleeing before the Goths under Alaric. After the death of her husband, Sextus Petronius Probus, in 395, Proba chose to remain a widow. Along with Juliana, also a widow by 410, and Demetrias, Proba came to Africa after the fall of Rome.

Augustine replies to her question about how we are to pray always. Though Proba is hardly poor and desolate, as St. Paul describes a true widow, Proba should understand that in this world no one can be secure (paragraph 1). Augustine explains how the rich can enter the kingdom of heaven (paragraph 2). Out of a love for the true life to come Proba ought to consider herself desolate in this life despite the consolation of her wealth, friends, and family (paragraphs 3 and 4). In the darkness of this life all ought to consider themselves desolate and persist in prayer, for we remain desolate until we obtain eternal life (paragraphs 5 and 6). One should seek riches only for maintaining good health and should shun all love for them (paragraphs 7 and 8).

Having explained with what disposition Proba ought to pray, Augustine turns to what she ought to pray for, since Paul said that *we do not know what to pray for as we ought* (Rom 8:26). He tells her to pray for the happy life (paragraph 9). He argues that those who live as they want are not happy, unless they want what is right (paragraph 10). It is not the possession of temporal goods that makes life happy; rather, temporal goods are to be sought for the sake of a morally good life (paragraphs 11 and 12). Good health and friendship are sought for their own sakes; a sufficient amount of other things are sought for the sake of these two (paragraph 13). All these temporal goods, however, should be sought only for the acquisition of eternal life (paragraph 14).

Why are we told to pray always and to be persistent in prayer if God knows what we need before we ask? Augustine appeals to the gospel parables of the widow and the unjust judge and of the man whose guest arrives late at night and catches him without food to illustrate how readily God answers persistent prayers (paragraph 15). He interprets another directive on prayer from the gospel in a figurative sense and explains that prayer does not make our needs known to God but exercises our desire so that our heart is big enough to receive what God offers (paragraphs 16 and 17).

Augustine turns to the apostle's directive telling us to pray without ceasing, which he interprets in the sense that we are to desire eternal life unceasingly (paragraph 18). Our prayer should not be long in the sense of many words, but in the sense of our lasting desire (paragraph 19). He appeals to the short prayers of the Egyptian monks that they used to keep their intention fervent without using many words (paragraph 20). The Lord's Prayer provides us with a list of things we should ask for (paragraph 21), and petitions found in the Old Testament are

shown to ask for the same things as the Lord's Prayer asks for (paragraph 22). We should pray for all these things for ourselves and for our friends, for strangers and for our enemies (paragraph 23). Augustine has explained the disposition with which one ought to pray and what one ought to pray for; he adds that fasting and almsgiving help one who prays (paragraph 24).

Why, then, did the apostle say that *we do not know what we should pray for as we ought*? Augustine explains that temporal difficulties and tribulations are often beneficial and that, since we do not know this, we ask God to take them away (paragraph 25). Hence, if God does not take from us certain tribulations, we should not think that he has abandoned us, nor should we think that we are important if God hears our prayers (paragraph 26). If we ask God for the happy life, we can ask for it with confidence and ask for all else for the sake of it (paragraph 27). Though we do not know what the happy life will be, the Holy Spirit teaches us and helps our weakness (paragraph 28).

Finally, Augustine tells Proba that the duty of prayer pertains in a special way to widows and appeals to the example of the widow, Anna, in the Gospel of Luke (paragraph 29). He urges her to regard herself as destitute and desolate in order that she may devote herself to praying for the true riches of eternal life (paragraph 30). In closing, he asks Proba to pray for him (paragraph 31).

*Bishop Augustine, the servant of Christ and of the servants of Christ, sends greetings in the Lord to Proba, the venerable servant of God.*

1. 1. Recalling that you asked and that I promised that I would write something for you on praying to God, when he to whom we pray granted us the time and opportunity, I must now at last pay my debt and yield to your pious desire in the love of Christ. I cannot explain in words how this request of yours has caused me joy, for I recognize in it the great concern you have for so important a matter. After all, what more important task ought to occupy your widowhood than to persist in prayers night and day in accord with the advice of the apostle? He, of course, says, *But she who is truly a widow and desolate has placed her hope in the Lord and persists in prayers night and day* (1 Tm 5:5). Since you are among the nobility of this world, a wealthy woman, and the mother of such a large family, and thus, though a widow, not desolate, it can therefore seem surprising that a concern for prayer has taken over your heart and claimed it principally for itself, if it were not that you wisely understand that in this world and in this life no soul can be secure.

2. Hence he who gave you that thought, of course, does what he did for his own disciples. When they were saddened, not for themselves but for the human race, and were without hope that anyone can be saved after they heard from him that it is *easier for a camel to enter the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven* (Mt 19:24, Mk 10:25, Lk 18:25), he replied with a marvelous and most merciful promise that what is impossible for human beings

is easy for God.<sup>1</sup> He, then, for whom it is easy even for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven, has inspired you with this pious concern about which you thought that you should consult me, namely, how you ought to pray. For, when he was still here in the flesh, he admitted Zacchaeus, a rich man, into the kingdom of heaven, and once he had been glorified by the resurrection and ascension, he afterwards by the gift of the Holy Spirit caused many rich persons to hold this world in contempt and to be richer, when their desire for riches was ended. After all, how would you desire to pray to the Lord in this way if you did not have hope in him? But how would you have hope in him if you placed your hope in the uncertainty of riches and scorned the most salutary command that the apostle states, *Command the rich of this world not to be proud and to place their hope not in the uncertainty of riches but in the living God who gives us all things in abundance to enjoy. Let them be rich in good works, give readily, and share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the future in order that they may attain true life* (1 Tm 6:17-19).

2, 3. Out of a love for this true life, therefore, you should also regard yourself as desolate in this world, however great the happiness with which you are living in it. For, as that is the true life in comparison with which this life, which is loved much, should, of course, not even be called life, however pleasant and long it is, so it is also the true consolation that God promises through the prophet when he says, *I shall give them true consolation, peace upon peace* (Is 57:18-19 LXX). Without that consolation, whatever earthly consolations there are, they contain more desolation than consolation. What consolation comes from wealth and the top positions of honor and other things of this sort because of which mortals who lack that true happiness suppose they are happy? After all, it is better not to need than to be preeminent in those things that torment one more with the fear of their loss, once they are attained, than by the passion to get them, when they are desired. Human beings do not become good because of such goods, but having been made good by other means they make these things good by using them well. True consolation, then, is not found in these, but is rather found where there is true life. For it is necessary that a human being become happy from what makes one good.

4. But good human beings seem even in this life to provide no small consolation. For, if poverty pinches, if grief saddens, if bodily pain disturbs, if exile discourages, if any other disaster torments, provided that there are present good human beings who know not only how *to rejoice with those in joy*, but also *to weep with those who weep* (Rom 12:15) and can speak and converse in a helpful way, those rough spots are smoothed, the heavy burdens are lightened, and adversity is overcome. But he who by his Spirit makes them good does all this in them and through them. If, on the other hand, riches abound, no death occurs,

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1. See Mt 19:26, Mk 10:27, and Lk 18:25.

bodily health is present, and one lives in a country safe from attack, but evil human beings also dwell there among whom there is no one who can be trusted, no one from whom one does not suffer and fear deceit, fraud, anger, quarrels, and attacks, are not those former things bitter and hard without anything joyful or pleasant in them? Thus in no human affairs is anything dear to a human being without a friend. But where is such a friend found about whose heart and character one can in this life have a certain confidence? For no one is known to another as each is known to himself, and yet no one is known to himself so that he can be confident about his own manner of life tomorrow. Hence, though many are known from their fruits<sup>2</sup> and some bring joy to their neighbor by their good lives, while others cause them sorrow by their bad lives, the apostle is, nonetheless, perfectly correct in warning us on account of our ignorance and uncertainty about human minds that we should not judge anything before the time when the Lord comes and brings to light things now hidden in darkness and reveals the thoughts of the heart, and then each will have praise from God.<sup>3</sup>

5. In the darkness, then, of this life in which we are journeying away from the Lord while we walk by faith and not by vision,<sup>4</sup> the Christian soul ought to regard itself as desolate so that it does not cease to pray, and it should learn to turn the eye of faith to the words of the divine and holy scriptures, as if to a lamp set in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts.<sup>5</sup> For the ineffable source, so to speak, of this lamp is that light which shines in the darkness so that the darkness does not grasp it, and in order to see it hearts must be cleansed by faith. *Blessed*, after all, *are the pure of heart because they shall see God* (Mt 5:8), and, *We know that, when he appears, we shall see him as he is* (1 Jn 3:2). Then there will be true life after death and true consolation after desolation. That life will deliver our soul from death, and that consolation will keep our eyes from tears.<sup>6</sup> And, since in that life there will be no temptation, there follows in the same psalm, *And our feet from slipping* (Ps 115:8). But if there will be no temptation, there will be no prayer. For there will be no expectation of the good that was promised, but the contemplation of the good that has been received. Hence, *I shall be pleasing to the Lord in the land of the living* (Ps 115:9), where we shall no longer be in the desert of the dead where we now are. *For we have died*, says the apostle, *and our life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, your life, shall have appeared, then you will also appear with him in glory* (Col 3:3-4). This is the true life, which the rich are commanded to lay hold of by good works, and there is true consolation. Because of that consolation a desolate widow, even one who has children and grandchildren, who piously governs her

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2. See Mt 7:16-20.

3. See 1 Cor 4:5.

4. See 2 Cor 5:6-7.

5. See 2 Pt 1:19.

6. See Ps 115:8.



home, and works with all her family in order that they may place their hope in God, says, nonetheless, in prayer, *My soul has thirsted for you; how many ways my flesh has thirsted for you in the desert land without any road or any water* (Ps 63:2-3), that is, in this life destined for death, with however many mortal consolations it is filled, with however many companions we have on the journey, no matter what an abundance of wealth we have accumulated. You, of course, know how uncertain all these things are, and in comparison with that happiness promised us what would they be, even if they were not uncertain.

6. Because you, a wealthy and noble widow and a mother of so large a family, have asked me for some words on prayer, I have said these things in order that, even though your family members remain with you and attend you in this life, you may consider yourself desolate as long as you have not yet, of course, attained that other life where there will be true and certain consolation, where the words of the prophecy will be fulfilled: *We have been filled in the morning with your mercy, and we have exulted and rejoiced all our days. We have rejoiced over the days on which you humbled us, over the years in which we have seen evils* (Ps 90:14-15).

3. 7. Therefore, before this consolation comes, however much you are surrounded with the happiness that comes from temporal goods, remember that you are desolate in order that you may persist *in prayers night and day*. For the apostle did not assign this task to just any widow, but said, *But she who is truly a widow and desolate has placed her hope in the Lord and persists in prayers night and day* (1 Tm 5:5). Regarding what follows, however, be most vigilant: *She, however, who lives amid pleasures is dead, even though she is alive* (1 Tm 5:6). For a person lives amid the things which he loves, which he desires as important, by which he thinks that he is happy. Hence, what scripture says of riches, *If riches abound, do not set your heart upon them* (Ps 62:11), I say also of pleasures, "If pleasures abound, do not set your heart upon them." Do not consider yourself great because they are not lacking, because they present themselves in abundance, because they flow as if from a most bountiful spring of earthly happiness. Disdain and scorn these things utterly in yourself so that you do not seek anything in them but full well-being of the body. After all, we should not scorn this because of its necessary uses in this life before this mortal body is clothed with immortality,<sup>7</sup> that is, with true, perfect, and perpetual well-being, which is not restored through corruptible pleasure when it gives out because of earthly weakness but is enlivened with eternal incorruptibility as it persists with a heavenly strength. For the apostle himself says, *Do not make provision for the flesh with its desires* (Rom 13:14). After all, we take care of the flesh, but for the needs of its health. *For no one ever hates his own flesh* (Eph 5:29), as the same apostle says. This is the reason why he advises Timothy, who was, it seems, too

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7. See 1 Cor 15:54.

severe in chastising his body, to take a little wine for the sake of his stomach and his frequent illnesses.<sup>8</sup>

8. If a widow lives amid these pleasures, that is, if she clings to and dwells upon them with the delight of her heart, she is dead, though she is still alive. Many holy men and women, therefore, completely shunning riches themselves, as if riches were the mothers of these pleasures, have distributed them to the poor and have in such a way stored them up more safely in heavenly storehouses. But if, overcome by some duty of love toward your family, you do not do this, you know what account of them you must give to God. For no one knows what goes on in a man but the spirit of the man that is in him.<sup>9</sup> We should not judge anything before the time when the Lord comes and brings to light things now hidden in darkness, and he will reveal the thoughts of the heart, and then each will have praise from God.<sup>10</sup> It belongs, nonetheless, to your concern as a widow that, if pleasures abound, you not set your heart upon them<sup>11</sup> for fear that, by rotting in them, your heart may die, which you ought to lift up in order that it may live. Consider yourself in the number of those of whom it says in scripture, *Their hearts will live for age upon age* (Ps 22:27).

4. 9. You have heard the sort of person you should be when you pray;<sup>12</sup> now also hear what you should pray for. After all, you thought that you should consult me especially on this point, since it bothers you that the apostle said, *For we do not know what to pray for as we ought* (Rom 8:26), and you were afraid that it may harm you more not to pray as you ought than not to pray. I can, therefore, tell you this in a few words: Pray for the happy life, for all human beings want to have this. After all, even those who live most evil and wicked lives would by no means live such lives unless they thought that they would at least be happy in that way. What else, then, should you pray for but that which both the evil and the good desire, but which only the good attain?

5. 10. Here you may perhaps ask what the happy life is. That question has consumed the minds and leisure of many philosophers. Yet they were less able to discover it to the extent that they paid less honor to its source and gave him less thanks. First of all, then, consider whether one should agree with those who say that a man is happy who lives as he wills. But heaven forbid that we should believe that this is true! For what if he should will to live a wicked life? Is he not proven to be more wretched the more easily he carries out his evil will? Even those who have philosophized without worshiping God have rightly rejected this view. For one of them, a man of great eloquence, said, "Look: others, not

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8. See 1 Tm 5:23.

9. See 1 Cor 2:11.

10. See 1 Cor 4:5.

11. See Ps 62:11.

12. I have followed the reading in the NBA edition of *qualis ores* in place of the CSEL reading of *qualiter ores*.

philosophers, of course, but men ready for an argument, say that all are happy who live as they want. That is, of course, false. For to want what is not proper is the most wretched thing, nor is it so wretched not to obtain what you want as to want to obtain what you ought not."<sup>13</sup> What do you think of these words? Are they not words spoken by the truth itself, no matter who said them? We can, therefore, say in this case what the apostle said of a certain Cretan prophet when he agreed with his opinion, *This testimony is true* (Ti 1:13).

11. That person, then, is happy who has everything he wants and does not want anything which is not proper. But if that is so, see now what human beings do not improperly want. One man wants to marry; another who has been widowed chooses to live from now on in continence. Another wants to experience no intercourse, even in marriage. Even if here one thing is found to be better than another, we cannot, nonetheless, say that anyone of them wants something improperly. It is the same with desiring children, that is, the fruit of marriage, and the life and salvation of those already born—a desire that very often occupies even widows living in continence. For, even though they do not now want to procreate children, since they have scorned marriage, they want those whom they have procreated to live safely and soundly. Those who live with virginal integrity are free from this concern, but they have all those dear ones whose temporal well-being they also quite properly desire. But when human beings have attained this well-being in their own cases and in that of those whom they love, will we be able to say that they are happy? For they have something that it is not improper to want. But if they do not have other greater and better things and ones richer in usefulness and moral beauty, they are still far distant from the happy life.

6. 12. Do we approve, then, that beyond this temporal well-being they desire honors and positions of power for themselves and their family? Yes, it is proper to will these things if it is their responsibility to provide for those who live subject to them, not on account of these things themselves but on account of another good that comes from them. But if they are desired on account of an empty pride over their superiority and on account of the superfluous or even harmful pomp of vanity, it is not proper. As the apostle says, *Piety with a sufficiency is a great gain. After all, we brought nothing into this world, nor can we take anything out of it. Having food and clothing, let us be content with these. For those who want to become rich fall into temptation and into a snare and many foolish and harmful desires that plunge human beings into destruction. The root of all evils, after all, is love of money, and in their desire for it some have wandered away from the faith and involved themselves in many sorrows* (1 Tm 6:6-10). And so, if they desire for themselves and for theirs a sufficient amount of necessary things and do not desire any more, they do not desire improperly.

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13. Cicero, *Hortensius*; see Augustine, *The Happy Life* 10 and *The Trinity* XIII, 5, 8.

Otherwise, they do not desire this and their desire is improper. He desired and prayed for this who said, *Do not give me either riches or poverty, but provide for me what is necessary in a sufficient amount so that, having plenty, I do not become a liar and say, "Who sees me?" or that, having been reduced to poverty, I steal and swear upon the name of my God* (Prv 30:8-9; LXX 24:31-32). You see, of course, that this sufficiency is not desired on account of itself but on account of the health of the body and the suitable attire of a human person, for with such attire one is not unsuitable for those with whom one must live as a good and responsible person.

13. In all these things, therefore, the health and friendship of a human being are sought for their own sake, but a sufficient amount of necessary goods is generally sought not for their own sake but for the sake of the two previous things, when they are sought in a proper fashion. But this health consists of life itself and of the wholeness of mind and body. Likewise, friendship should not be bounded by narrow limits, for it embraces all to whom we owe affection and love, though it is inclined more eagerly toward some and more hesitantly toward others. It, however, extends even to enemies, for whom we are also commanded to pray. Thus there is no one in the human race to whom we do not owe love, even if not out of mutual love, at least on account of our sharing in a common nature. But these persons by whom we are loved in return by a holy and chaste love are a great source of delight, and rightly so. We ought to pray that, when we have these goods, we may retain them and that, when we do not have them, we may acquire them.

7. 14. Is this the whole of it, and are these all the things by which the essence of the happy life is constituted? Or does truth teach that there is something else that is preferred to all these? For that sufficiency and health, either one's own or that of friends, must be cast aside, as long as they are temporal, for the acquisition of eternal life. Although the body may be thought healthy, the soul should in no way be thought healthy if it does not prefer eternal to temporal things. After all, one does not profitably live in time except by earning the merit by which he may live in eternity. The other things, then, that are usefully and properly desired must undoubtedly be referred to that one life by which one lives for God and from God. In him we, of course, love ourselves if we love God, and by the other commandment we truly in that way love our neighbors as ourselves if we bring them, to the extent we can, to a similar love of God. We, therefore, love God on account of himself and love ourselves and our neighbors on account of him. And when we live in that way, we should not suppose that we are already situated in the happy life itself, as if there were nothing more to pray for. For how do we already live happily when there is still lacking the one thing on account of which we are living a good life?

8. 15. Why, then, are we distracted by many things and ask what we should pray for, fearing that we might not pray as we ought? Why do we not rather say

with the psalm, *One thing I have asked of the Lord; this I seek, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, that I may contemplate the delight of the Lord and visit his temple* (Ps 27:4)? For there all the days do not become all by coming and going, nor is the beginning of one the end of another. All are at once without end where life itself, to which those days belong, has no end. The true Life himself taught us to pray for the sake of acquiring this happy life, not in many words, as if we are heard to the extent we are more long-winded when we pray to him who knows, as the Lord says, what we need before we ask him.<sup>14</sup> For this reason it might seem strange that, though he forbade the use of many words, he who knows what we need before we ask him exhorted us to pray in such a way that he said, *It is necessary to pray always and not give up* (Lk 18:1). And he proposed the example of a certain widow who, desiring to receive vindication from her enemy, persuaded by her entreaties the unjust judge to hear her, not because he was moved by justice or mercy, but because he was overcome by her pestering. He wanted to teach us from this how much more certain it is that the merciful and just Lord God hears us when we pray without ceasing, since she could not be ignored even by an unjust and wicked judge because of her constant entreaties. He wanted to teach us how gladly and lovingly God fulfills the desires of those who he knows have pardoned the sins of others, if that widow who wanted to be vindicated got what she wanted. That man too who had a friend arrive from a journey and did not have anything to offer him wanted another friend to give him three loaves of bread—by which perhaps the Trinity in one substance was symbolized. With his most insistent and bothersome requests he awakened the friend, who was already asleep along with his servants, so that he gave him as much as he wanted, more in order to avoid the bother than out of any thought of friendship.<sup>15</sup> He taught this so that we might understand that, if a man is forced to give who, though he is asleep, is awakened against his will by the one asking him, he who cannot sleep and wakes us when we are sleeping will give us what we ask much more lovingly.

16. On this point there is also that passage, *Ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; knock and it will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and one who seeks finds, and to one who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his child asks for bread, will hand him a stone; or if he asks for a fish, will hand him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will hand him a scorpion? If, then, you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him!* (Lk 11:9-13). Since, therefore, in accord with those three things which the apostle commends, faith is signified by the fish, either on account of the water of baptism or because it is unharmed amid the waters of this world, its

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14. See Mt 6:8.

15. See Lk 11:5-8.

contrary is that serpent which urged by its most poisonous deceit that God not be believed in. Hope is signified by the egg because the chick is not as yet living, but will be, and it is not already seen, but is hoped for—for *hope that is seen is not hope* (Rom 8:24). And its contrary is the scorpion, because one who hopes for eternal life forgets those things which are behind and stretches out to what is ahead;<sup>16</sup> it is harmful for such a one to look back. But one must avoid a scorpion in that part where it has in the back its venom and stinger. Love is signified by the bread, *for love is the greatest of these* (1 Cor 13:13), and among foods the benefit of bread, of course, surpasses the rest. Its contrary is a stone, because hard hearts reject love. Or these things may signify something else more suitably, but he who knows how to give good gifts to his children compels us to ask, to seek, and to knock.

17. Why he who knows what we need before we ask him does this can trouble the mind unless we understand that the Lord our God does not want our will, which he cannot fail to know, to become known to him, but our desire, by which we can receive what he prepares to give, to be exercised in prayers. For what he prepares to give is very great, but we are very small and narrow for receiving it. Therefore it is said to us, *Make your heart bigger so that you do not bear that yoke with unbelievers* (2 Cor 6:11). That which is, indeed, very great, *which the eye has not seen*, because it is not a color, *and the ear has not heard*, because it is not a sound, *nor has it ascended into the heart of a human being* (1 Cor 2:9), because the heart of a human being ought to ascend to it, we shall receive with a greater capacity to the extent that we believe it with more fidelity, and hope for it more firmly, and love it more ardently.

9. 18. We, therefore, always pray with a continuous desire filled with faith, hope, and love. But at certain hours and moments we also pray to God in words so that by those signs of things we may admonish ourselves, realize how much we have advanced in this desire, and arouse ourselves more intensely to increase it. For a more worthy result ensues when a more fervent love has preceded. And for this reason the apostle said, *Pray without ceasing* (1 Thes 5:17). What else does that mean but, "Desire without ceasing the happy life," which is none but eternal life, and desire it from him who alone can give it? Let us always desire this and always pray for this from the Lord God. But at certain hours, by the words of prayer, we call the mind back to the task of praying from other cares and concerns, which in a sense cool down this desire. In that way we remind ourselves to aim at that which we desire; otherwise, our desire that had begun to cool might become completely cold and be entirely extinguished if it were not set afire more frequently. Hence, the words of the same apostle, *Let your requests be made known before God* (Phil 4:6), should not be interpreted in the sense that they become known to God who, of course, had known them before

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16. See Phil 3:13.

they existed, but that might become known to us before God through our patience, not before human beings through our boasting, or perhaps that they might also become known to the angels. For the angels stand before God in order to offer them to God in some way, to consult him about them, and to convey to us in either a clear or a hidden manner what they know we should carry out at God's command, as before God they know that we should. For an angel said to the man, *And now while you and Sarah were praying, I presented your prayer in the sight of the glory of God* (Tb 12:12, LXX).

10, 19. Since this is so, it is not wrong or useless also to pray for a long time when one is free, that is, when it does not interfere with other duties involving good and necessary actions, though even in them one should always pray, as I said, with that desire. For praying for a longer time does not mean, as some suppose, praying with many words.<sup>17</sup> Much talking is one thing; a lasting love is another. For scripture says even of the Lord himself that he spent the night in prayer<sup>18</sup> and that he prayed at great length.<sup>19</sup> In doing this what else did he do but offer us an example, insofar as he suitably offered prayers in time and, as eternal, heard them along with the Father?

20. The brothers in Egypt are said to say frequent prayers, but very brief ones that are tossed off as if in a rush, so that a vigilant and keen intention, which is very necessary for one who prays, may not fade away and grow dull over longer periods. And in this way they show that, just as this intention should not grow dull if it cannot last long, so it should not be quickly broken off if it does last. Let many words, after all, be kept far from our prayer, but let our petitions not lack persistence, if the intention remains fervent. For to speak much in praying is to do something necessary with superfluous words, but to petition him much to whom we pray is to knock with a long and pious stirring of the heart. For this task is very often carried out more with sighs than words, more with weeping than with speaking. But he places our tears in his sight, and our sighing is not hidden from him who created all things by his Word and does not seek human words.

11, 21. We, then, need words by which we may be reminded and may consider what we ask for, not by which we believe that we should either instruct or persuade the Lord. When, therefore, we say, *May your name be made holy* (Mt 6:9), we remind ourselves to desire that his name, which is always holy, may be also held holy among human beings, that is, that it may not be scorned. This is something that benefits human beings, not God. And when we say, *May your kingdom come* (Mt 6:10), it will surely come whether we want it to or not, but we stir up our desire for that kingdom that it may come for us and that we may merit to reign in it. When we say, *May your will also be done on earth as it is in heaven*

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17. See Mt 6:9.

18. See Lk 6:12.

19. See Lk 22:43.

(Mt 6:10), we ask him to give us obedience so that his will may be done in us as it is done in the heavens by the angels. When we say, *Give us today our daily bread* (Mt 6:11), the term “today” means at the time when we are asking for all we need, referring to the whole by its principal element, that is, by the term “bread,” or referring to the sacrament of the faithful that is needed in this time, not for acquiring the happiness of this time but for acquiring that eternal happiness. When we say, *Forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors* (Mt 6:12), we remind ourselves of both what we should ask for and what we should do in order that we may merit to receive it. When we say, *Do not bring us into temptation* (Mt 6:13), we remind ourselves to ask that we may not be abandoned by his help and consent to any temptation, after being deceived, or yield to any temptation, after being afflicted. When we say, *Deliver us from evil* (Mt 6:13), we remind ourselves to bear in mind that we are not yet in that good state in which we will suffer no evil. And this petition that is placed last in the Lord’s Prayer is, of course, so widely applicable that, in whatever tribulation Christians may find themselves, they utter their groans in it, pour forth their tears in it, begin with it, linger over it, and bring their prayers to an end with it. For it was necessary that the truth itself be committed to our memory by these words.

12. 22. For whatever other words we might say that the desire of the person at prayer forms beforehand in order that it may be clear or attends to afterwards in order that it may increase, we say nothing else but what is contained in that prayer of the Lord if we pray correctly and properly. But whoever says something that cannot belong to this prayer from the gospel, even if he does not pray in a way that is forbidden, prays in a carnal manner, something that I do not know how one can say is not forbidden, since it is fitting that those reborn of the Spirit pray only in a spiritual manner. After all, what else does one say who says, *Be glorified among all the nations as you have been glorified among us* (Sir 36:4), and, *May your prophets be found faithful* (Sir 36:18), but, *May your name be made holy*? What else does one say who says, *God of hosts, convert us and show us your face, and we shall be saved* (Ps 79:4), but, *May your kingdom come*? What else does one say who says, *Guide my journeys according to your word, and let not all iniquity lord it over me* (Ps 119:133), but, *May your will also be done on earth as it is in heaven*? What else does one say who says, *Do not give me poverty or riches* (Prv 30:8), but, *Give us today our daily bread*? What else does one say who says, *Remember, Lord, David, and all his kindness* (Ps 132:1), or, *Lord, if I have done this, if there is iniquity on my hands, if I have done evil to those who did evil to me* (Ps 7:4-5), but, *Forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors*? What else does one say who says, *Remove from me the desires of the belly, and let not the desire for intercourse lay hold of me* (Sir 23:6), but, *Do not bring us into temptation*? What else does one say who says, *Rescue me, O God, from my enemies, and deliver me from those who rise up against me* (Ps



59:2), but, *Deliver us from evil?* If you run through all the words of holy petitions, you will not find, in my opinion, anything that this prayer of our Lord does not contain and include. Hence we are free, when we pray, to express the same petitions now with these and now with those words, but we should not to be free to make other petitions.

23. Without any wavering of doubt we ought to pray for these things for ourselves and for ours, for strangers and even for enemies, although for different persons a different affection arises in and lifts up the heart of the person at prayer in accord with the closeness and the distance of their relationships. But if anyone who says in prayer, for example, "Give me as much wealth as you gave this person or that," or, "Increase my honors; make me powerful and famous in this world," or anything else of this sort, and says this because he has a craving for them, not because he looks to how he can be helpful to human beings in a way pleasing to God, I do not think that he finds in the Lord's Prayer a petition under which he can fit his desires. Hence, he ought at least to be ashamed to ask for what he is not ashamed to desire, or if he is ashamed of this too, but desire wins out, how much better it is for him to pray to be delivered even from the evil of this desire by him to whom we say, *Deliver us from evil!*

13, 24. In my opinion you have not only what sort of person you should be when you pray, but also what you should pray for, not from my teaching, but from the teaching of him who has deigned to teach us all. We should ask for the happy life; we should beg God for this. Regarding what it is to be happy, many have developed many arguments, but why do we turn to the many and their many arguments? In the scripture of God it is briefly and truthfully stated, *Blessed is the people whose God is the Lord!* (Ps 144:15). In order that we may belong to this people and be able to come to contemplate him and to live with him without end, *the end of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from faith unfeigned* (1 Tm 1:5). In listing the same three, "hope" often takes the place of "a good conscience." Therefore, faith, hope, and love<sup>20</sup> lead one who prays to God, that is, one who believes, hopes, desires, and considers what he asks of God in the Lord's Prayer. Fasting, the restraining of carnal concupiscence from other pleasures without neglect of one's health, and especially almsgiving help prayer a great deal so that we can say, *At the time of my tribulation I sought God with my hands at night in his presence, and I was not disappointed* (Ps 77:3). After all, how is God who is incorporeal and intangible sought by hands unless he is sought by works?

14, 25. There perhaps still remains for you to ask why the apostle said, *We do not know what we should pray for as we ought* (Rom 8:26). For we should in no way believe that either the apostle or those to whom he said this did not know the Lord's Prayer. Why, then, do we suppose that he said what he could have said

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20. See 1 Cor 13:13.

neither thoughtlessly nor mistakenly, unless it is that temporal trouble and tribulations very often are beneficial either for healing the swelling of pride or for testing and practicing patience, for which a more splendid reward is reserved when it is tested and practiced, or for chastising and destroying sins of any sort? But we, who do not know what benefit they bring, long to be delivered from all tribulation. The apostle showed that he himself was not a stranger to this ignorance, unless he perhaps knew what he should pray for as he ought when, so that he would not be filled with pride over the greatness of his revelations, he was given a thorn in his flesh, an angel of Satan, to strike him. On this account he asked the Lord three times to take it away from him, obviously not knowing what he should pray for as he ought. Then he heard God's answer why he did not do what so great a man prayed for and why it was not good for him that God do so: *My grace is sufficient for you, for virtue is made perfect in weakness* (2 Cor 12:9).

26. In these tribulations, then, which can be both profitable and harmful, we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, and, nonetheless, because they are hard, because they are troublesome, because they are against the sensibility of our weakness, we pray with a will found in all human beings that these things be taken away from us. But we owe this much devotion to the Lord our God that, if he does not take them away, we do not for this reason think that he is neglecting us, but rather hope for greater goods through the pious suffering of evils. For in that way *virtue is made perfect in weakness*. In anger, of course, the Lord God granted to some impatient people what they were asking, just as, on the contrary, out of mercy he refused to give the apostle what he was asking for. After all, we read what the people of Israel asked for and how they asked and received, but after their desire was fulfilled, their impatience was severely chastised.<sup>21</sup> When they asked, he gave them a king according to their heart, not according to his heart, as scripture says.<sup>22</sup> He also gave what the devil asked, namely, that his servant might be tempted in order to put him to the test.<sup>23</sup> He heard even the unclean spirits when they asked that the legion of spirits be sent into the herd of swine.<sup>24</sup> These events are included in scripture so that no one should think himself great if his prayers are heard when he impatiently asks for something that it would benefit him more not to obtain, or so that no one is downcast and despairing about God's mercy toward him if his prayer is not heard when he is perhaps asking for something by which he would be afflicted more terribly if he received it or be corrupted by prosperity and completely ruined. In such matters, then, *we do not know what we should pray for as we ought*. Hence, if something happens contrary to what we pray for, we ought, while bearing this patiently and

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21. See Nm 11:1-34.

22. See 1 Sm 8:7.

23. See Job 1:12, 2:6.

24. See Mt 8:30-32 and Lk 8:32.

giving thanks in all things, by no means to doubt that what God's will contained, not our will, ought rather to have been done. For the mediator offered us an example of this as well; after he had said, *Father, if it is possible, let this chalice pass from me*, he transformed the human will in himself that he assumed along with the man and added, *Yet not what I will, but what you will, Father* (Mt 26:39). This is the reason why *many were rightly made righteous by the obedience of the one* (Rom 8:25).

27. But whoever asks this one thing from the Lord and seeks it<sup>25</sup> asks for it with certainty and security and does not fear that it may be harmful when he has received it, for without it nothing is of benefit, whatever else one might receive as he ought. It is, after all, the one true and only happy life, namely, that, immortal and incorruptible in body and in spirit, we contemplate the delight of the Lord for eternity. On account of this one thing, seek and properly ask for the rest. Whoever has it will have everything he wants, nor will he be able to want to have something there that will not be proper.<sup>26</sup> There, of course, is found the fountain of life, for which we must thirst in prayer as long as we live in hope and do not as yet see what we hope for, under the protection of his wings before whom is all our desire, in order that we may be inebriated by the richness of his house and may drink of the torrent of his pleasure.<sup>27</sup> For before him is the fountain of life, and in his light we shall see the light,<sup>28</sup> when our desire will be satisfied with good things and there will remain nothing further that we seek amid groaning, but only what we possess amid rejoicing. Because, nevertheless, this is peace that surpasses all understanding,<sup>29</sup> even when we ask for it in prayer, *we do not know what we should pray for as we ought*. For we, of course, do not know what we cannot think of as it is; rather, whatever comes to mind as we think, we cast aside, reject, disapprove, and know that this is not what we seek although we do not know what sort of thing that is.

14, 28. There is in us, therefore, a certain learned ignorance, so to speak, but an ignorance learned from the Spirit of God, who helps our weakness. For, after the apostle had said, *But if we hope for what we do not see, we await it with patience* (Rom 8:25), he added there: *In a similar way the Spirit also helps our weakness. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with inexpressible groans. But he who searches hearts knows what the Spirit thinks because he intercedes for the saints in accord with the mind of God* (Rom 8:26-27). We should not understand this so that we suppose that the Holy Spirit of God, who is immutable God in the Trinity, one God with the Father and the Son, intercedes for the saints like someone who is not himself

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25. See Ps 27:4.

26. I have followed the reading adopted by the NBA which follows the early editions.

27. See Ps 35:9.

28. See 36:10.

29. See Phil 4:7.

God. Scripture, of course, says, *He intercedes for the saints*, because he makes the saints intercede. In the same way scripture said, *The Lord, your God, is testing you in order that he may know whether you love him* (Dt 13:3), that is, in order to make you know that you love him. He makes the saints intercede with inexpressible groans, therefore, when he inspires them with the desire for so great a still unknown reality, which we await with patience. How, after all, do we express, how do we desire what we do not know? For, if we were completely ignorant of it, we would certainly not desire it, and again, if we see it, we would not be desiring it or seeking it with groans.

29. Considering all these things and anything else that the Lord may have conveyed to you on this topic that either has not occurred to me or would take a long time for me to state, struggle to conquer this world in prayer; pray in hope; pray with faith and with love; pray persistently and patiently; pray like a widow of Christ. For, though to pray as one ought pertains to all his members, that is, to all who believe in him and are united with one another in his body, a more diligent concern for prayer is found in his scripture to be enjoined specially upon widows. Two women, after all, were called "Anna" with honor.<sup>30</sup> The one was a married woman who was the mother of holy Samuel; the other was a widow who recognized the Holy of Holies when he was still an infant. The married one also prayed with sorrow in her mind and affliction in her heart because she did not have children. Then she received Samuel and, having received him, gave him back to God because she had made a vow when she prayed.<sup>31</sup> But it is not easy to discover how her prayer belongs to that prayer of the Lord, unless in the words found there, *Deliver us from evil* (Mt 6:13), one sees that it is no small evil to be married and to lack the fruit of marriage, since the only grounds that justify marriage are the procreation of children. But see what is recorded about that Anna who was a widow, namely, that *she did not leave the temple, serving God with fasting and prayer night and day* (Lk 2:37). The apostle says the same thing in the words I quoted above, *But she who is truly a widow and desolate has placed her hope in the Lord and persists in prayers night and day* (1 Tm 5:5). And when the Lord urged us to pray always and not to give up, he mentioned a widow who persuaded a judge to hear her case by constantly entreating him, though he was unjust and wicked and held in contempt both God and human beings.<sup>32</sup> We can understand quite well how a widow should more than others have time for prayer from that fact that widows were chosen to give all of us an example in order to exhort us to take up the pursuit of prayer.

30. But what was it in widows that he chose for this sort of task but their abandonment and desolation? Hence, if every soul understands that it is abandoned

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30. See 1 Sm 1:2-28 and Lk 2:36-38.

31. See 1 Sm 1:11.

32. See Lk 18:1-5.

and desolate in this world as long as it is on a journey away from the Lord, it, of course, commends to God as its protector its widowhood by constant and most fervent prayer. Pray, then, as a widow of Christ who does not yet enjoy the vision of him for whose help you pray, and though you are very wealthy, pray as a poor woman. For you do not yet have the true wealth of the world to come where you will fear no losses. Though you have children and grandchildren and a large family, as I said above, pray as one who is desolate. For temporal goods are all uncertain, even those that will remain for our consolation up to the end of this life. But if you seek and savor those things that are above, you desire eternal and certain things, and as long as you do not have them, you ought to consider yourself as desolate, even if all of your dear ones are safe and sound and attending you. And if you do so, by your example your most devout daughter-in-law<sup>33</sup> and the other holy widows and virgins placed under your care will, of course, do so with greater security. For, the more piously you govern your house, the more fervently you should devote yourself to prayers, not occupied with the tasks of present affairs unless a motive of piety demands it.

31. Remember, of course, to pray earnestly for us too. For we do not want you to pay us an honor, which is dangerous for us, in such a way that you take away the help that we know is needed. The family of Christ prayed for Peter<sup>34</sup> and prayed for Paul.<sup>35</sup> We rejoice that you are in his family, and we need the help of your sisterly prayers incomparably more than Peter and Paul. Pray in competition with a holy and harmonious rivalry, for you do not compete against one another, but against the devil, the enemy of all the saints. Let each of you do what she can in fasting, vigils, and every chastisement of the body, by which prayer is helped very much. If another cannot do as much, let her do what she can if she loves in the other what she does not do because she cannot. Hence, let one who cannot do as much not hold back the one who can do more, and let not the one who can do more not urge on the one who cannot do as much. You, of course, owe an account of your conscience to God, but you should owe no one anything except to love one another.<sup>36</sup> May the Lord hear your prayer who is able to do more than what we ask for and understand.<sup>37</sup>

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33. Juliana was the daughter-in-law of Proba, the widow of the consul Olybrius and the mother of Demetrias.

34. See Acts 12:5.

35. See Acts 14:25.

36. See Rom 13:8.

37. See Eph 3:20.

## Letter 131

In 412 or 413 Augustine returned the greetings of Proba, to whom he had written the previous letter on prayer. He agrees with her comments on how our corruptible body is a burden to the soul in this life, and thanks her for her concern over his well-being.

*To his noble lady and rightly illustrious and most excellent daughter, Proba, Augustine sends greetings.*

It is true, as you say, that the soul situated in the corruptible body is held in the grip of a certain earthly disease and, weighed down in a sense by such a burden, it is bent over so that it more readily desires and thinks of many things below than the one thing above. After all, even the holy scripture says this as follows, *For the corruptible body weighs down the soul, and the earthly dwelling presses down the mind as it thinks of many things* (Wis 9:15). But for this reason our savior came, and by a word of healing he raised up that woman in the gospel who was bent over for eighteen years.<sup>1</sup> She perhaps symbolized the fact that the Christian soul does not hear in vain, "Lift up your heart," and does not respond in vain that she has lifted it up to the Lord.<sup>2</sup> Seeing this, you are right to consider the evils of this world tolerable because of the hope of the world to come. For in that way these evils are turned into good by their good use, while they do not increase our concupiscence but test our patience. On this the apostle says, *We know that for those who love God he makes all things work together for the good* (Rom 8:28). He says, *All things*, not merely those, therefore, that we seek as pleasant, but also those that we avoid as unpleasant when we accept some in such a way that we are not taken captive by them and endure others in such a way that we are not broken by them, and according to God's commands we give thanks in all things<sup>3</sup> to him of whom we say, *I shall bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall always be on my lips* (Ps 32:2), and, *It is good for me that you have humbled me in order that I may learn your decrees* (Ps 119:71). For, if the calm of deceptive prosperity always smiled upon us in this life, the human soul would not seek that harbor of true and certain security, my noble lady and rightly illustrious and most excellent daughter. And so, fulfilling the duty I owed to Your Excellency of returning your greetings and giving thanks that you have so devout a concern for our well-being, I ask for you from the Lord the rewards of the life to come and

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1. See Lk 13:11-13.

2. See *The Gelasian Sacramentary* I, 40: PL 74, 1100; Augustine alludes to the words of the introduction to the Preface to the Eucharistic Prayer.

3. See 1 Thes 5:18.

the consolations of the present life, and I commend myself to the love and prayer of all your family in whose hearts Christ dwells through faith.

[And in another hand:] May the true and truthful God truly console your heart and protect your well-being, my noble lady and rightly illustrious and most excellent daughter.

## Letter 132

In 411 or 412 Augustine wrote to Volusian, a pagan intellectual, the brother of Albina and uncle of Melania the Younger. At the time he was living in Carthage. Augustine urges him to read the scriptures, especially the letters of the apostles, and invites him to write back to him if he has any questions. Volusian replies with a series of questions in Letter 135, and Marcellinus forwards others in Letter 136. Augustine replies in Letter 137.

*To his illustrious lord and rightly most excellent son, Volusian, Bishop Augustine sends greetings.*

With regard to your well-being, which I desire both in this world and in Christ, I perhaps even myself am not surpassed by the prayers of your mother. Hence, in rendering to your merits the duty of sending my greetings, I exhort you, as much as I can, not to hesitate to devote your care to the truly and certainly holy writings. For they are something sincere and solid and do not allure the mind by obscure language, nor do they make any tottering inanity resound with the false beauty of rhetoric.<sup>1</sup> They deeply move someone who is eager not for words but for the truth, and deeply terrify, in order to render one secure. I especially encourage you to read the letters of the apostles, for by them you will be roused to know the prophets whose testimonies the apostles use. But if some question arises for you either when you are reading them or when you are pondering them, for the resolution of which I may seem useful, write to me in order that I may write back. For with the Lord's help I shall perhaps be able to talk about such things in this way better than if I were present, not only on account of the many things that both you and I have to do, since it may happen that, when I am free, you are not also free, but also on account of the intruding presence of those who are not suited for such an undertaking and find more delight in contests of the tongue than in the enlightenment of knowledge. But what you have in writing is always available for reading when the reader is free, and what you take up when you wish and put down when you wish is no bother when it is present.

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1. See Persius, *Satires (Saturnae)* V, 24, 25.



## Letter 133

Toward the end of 411 Augustine wrote to Marcellinus, the imperial commissioner who was also his friend. He urges Marcellinus not to punish the Donatist clerics and Circumcellions in accord with the horrible crimes that they have been proven guilty of having committed (paragraph 1). As Marcellinus used only a mild form of coercion in the inquest, so he should show the same sort of gentleness in the punishment of the crimes that were discovered (paragraph 2). If Marcellinus will not listen to Augustine speaking as a friend, he should as a Christian listen to the advice or even to the orders of a bishop. Finally, Augustine asks Marcellinus to pass on to his brother, Apringius, the proconsul, a letter that Augustine has written for him (paragraph 3).

*To my illustrious and rightly noble lord and dearest son, Marcellinus, Augustine sends greetings in the Lord.*

1. I have learned that those Circumcellions and clerics of the Donatist sect whom the official in charge of public safety led off from Hippo Regius to trial for their actions had their cases heard by Your Excellency and that very many of them confessed to murdering Restitutus, a Catholic priest, and to beating Innocent, another Catholic priest, and to tearing out his eye and cutting off his finger. For this reason a very great worry has come over me that Your Eminence might perhaps judge that they should be punished with such great severity of the laws that they suffer the sort of punishments they inflicted. By this letter I appeal through the mercy of Christ the Lord to the faith that you have in Christ that you not do this or allow it to happen at all. For, although we can deny any responsibility for the death of those who are seen to have been handed over for judgment, not due to accusations of ours, but because of the indictment of those who have charge of the defense of the public peace, we still do not want the sufferings of the servants of God to be avenged by punishments equal to those sufferings, as by the law requiring an eye for an eye. It is not that we would prevent criminals from losing the freedom to commit crimes, but we want it rather to be sufficient either that, alive and with no part of the body mutilated, they be taken from their mad restlessness and steered to the peace of good health by the restraints of the law or that they be assigned to some useful work away from their evil works. This is, of course, called condemnation, but who does not understand that it should be called a benefit rather than a punishment when their bold fierceness is restrained and the remedy of repentance is not withdrawn?

2. Carry out, O Christian judge, the duty of a loving father. Be angry at wickedness in such a way that you remember to be humane, and do not turn the desire for revenge upon the atrocities of sinners, but apply the will to heal to the wounds of sinners. Do not undo your fatherly diligence that you preserved in the inquiry when you obtained their confession of such great crimes not by limbs stretched upon the

rack, not by iron claws furrowing the flesh, not by burning with flames, but by a beating from rods—a form of restraint that is customarily practiced by teachers of the liberal arts, by parents themselves, and often even by bishops in their courts. Do not, then, punish in a more cruel manner what you have discovered in a more gentle manner. The need for inquiry is greater than that for punishment. For even the mildest human beings carefully and persistently examine a hidden crime in order to find out whom they may pardon. Hence it is generally necessary to carry out an inquisition with more severity in order that, once the crime has been made known, there might be room to display gentleness. All good works, of course, want to be set in the light, not on account of human glory, but, as the Lord says, *that people may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven* (Mt 5:16). And for this reason it is not enough for the apostle to warn that we preserve gentleness; we must also make it known to everyone. He says, *Let your gentleness be known to all human beings* (Phil 4:5), and in another passage, *Revealing your gentleness to all human beings* (Ti 3:2). Not even that clemency on the part of holy David, when he mercifully pardoned his enemy who was handed over to him,<sup>1</sup> would stand forth with such great clarity if his power were not equally apparent. Let the power to punish, therefore, not make you harsh, since the need to carry out an inquiry did not banish your gentleness. Do not, now that the crime has been discovered, look for an executioner, since in its discovery you were unwilling to use a torturer.

3. Finally, you were sent here for the benefit of the Church. I testify that this will benefit, that this will help the Catholic Church or, that I may not seem to step beyond the limit of my jurisdiction, will help the church that belongs to the diocese of Hippo Regius. If you do not listen to a friend begging you, listen to a bishop giving you advice. And yet, since I speak to a Christian, I would not be arrogant in saying, especially in such a case, that it is proper that you hear a bishop giving you an order, my excellent and rightly noble lord and dearest son. I know that ecclesiastical cases were, of course, especially enjoined upon Your Excellency, but because I believe that this concern pertains to that most illustrious and admirable man, the proconsul,<sup>2</sup> I also wrote a letter to him, which I ask that you not hesitate to hand over to him and to support if necessary. And I beg you both not to think our intercession, suggestion, or concern inopportune and not to taint the sufferings of the Catholic servants of God, which ought to be useful to the weak for spiritual edification, by an equally severe punishment of the enemies from whom they have suffered. But rather, having set aside the severity of a judge, do not forget to manifest your faith, since you are sons of the Church, as well as the mercy of our mother. May almighty God increase Your Excellency with every good, my excellent and rightly noble lord and most dear son.

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1. See 1 Sm 24:1-8.

2. That is, Apringius, the brother of Marcellinus, who was also a resident of Carthage. The letter in question is Letter 134.

## Letter 134

Toward the end of 411, Augustine wrote to Apringius, the proconsul and brother of Marcellinus. Augustine asks that Apringius, who is a Christian, listen to his petition and advice (paragraph 1). He asks and advises Apringius not to sentence to death the Circumcellions and Donatist clerics who have confessed vicious crimes against the Catholics (paragraph 2). He asks Apringius, who is a Catholic, not to mar the sufferings that the Catholics endured by spilling Donatist blood (paragraph 3). Finally, he pleads with Apringius to act with Christian clemency in sparing the lives of those who have confessed their guilt (paragraph 4).

*To his noble and rightly exalted lord and most excellent son, Apringius, Augustine sends greetings.*

1. I have no doubt that in the power which God gave to you, a human being, over human beings, you bear in mind the tribunal of God before which even judges will stand to render an account of the judgments they render. I, of course, know that you are instructed in the Christian faith, and for this reason I have greater confidence before Your Excellency, not only in asking, but also in advising, on account of that Lord in whose family you are numbered along with us by the law of heaven, in whom we equally place the hope of eternal life and whom we invoke on your behalf in the most sacred mysteries. Hence, my noble and rightly exalted lord and most excellent son, I first ask that I may not seem inopportune in your eyes to intrude upon your decisions with that concern which it is necessary that I exercise, especially for the church entrusted to me, whose interests I serve, and which I do not desire so much to preside over as to benefit. Secondly, I beg that you do not disdain to receive my advice or request and that you do not hesitate to follow it.

2. The concern of those who preserve the public security issued an indictment and brought certain Circumcellions and Donatist clerics before the courts of law. When these were tried by the most illustrious and admirable tribune and chancellor, your brother and my son, Marcellinus, after they were coerced, not by the torments of iron claws and of flames, but of rods, they confessed to terrible crimes that they committed against my brothers and fellow priests, namely, that they slew one of them who was taken by ambush and mutilated another who was taken from his home, by tearing out an eye and cutting off a finger. When I discovered that they had confessed to these crimes and, for this reason, had no doubt that they would come under the jurisdiction of your authority, I rushed this letter to Your Excellency. In it I beg and plead by the mercy of Christ that we may rejoice over your greater and more certain good fortune without their receiving comparable punishments in return. And yet the laws cannot, in

imposing punishment, cut off a finger with blows of a stone or gouge out an eye, as these men were able to do in their savagery. Hence, I am confident concerning these men, who confessed that they did this, that they will not receive the same punishment in turn. But I fear that either these men or those others whose act of murder has been revealed may be condemned to death by the sentence of your authority and, in order that this may not happen, I as a Christian beg the judge and as a bishop warn a Christian.

3. Concerning you, of course, we read that the apostle said that it is not without reason that you carry the sword and are ministers of God to punish those who do evil.<sup>1</sup> But a matter of interest for a province is not the same thing as a matter of interest for the Church. The governance of the former should be carried out with severity; the forbearance of the latter should be shown with mercy. If I were having this discussion with a judge who was not Christian, I would deal with him otherwise, but even so I would not abandon the interest of the Church. I would insist, to the extent that he allowed, that the sufferings of the Catholic servants of God, which ought to be beneficial as examples of patience, not become marred by the blood of their enemies, and, if he refused to yield, I would suspect that he was resisting me out of hostility. But now, when the matter is being handled before you, my plan is different, my approach is different. We, of course, see that you are a magistrate of lofty authority, but we also recognize that you are a son of Christian piety. If your lofty position is set aside, if your faith is set aside, I am examining with you an issue we have in common, but in this issue you can do what I cannot; make your decision along with us, and extend to us your help.

4. It has been carefully brought about that the enemies of the Church, who are in the habit of attracting ignorant minds by their empty words of deception, as if glorying over the persecution they boast that they suffer, have confessed their terrible crimes committed against Catholic clergy and are implicated by their own statements. We should read the proceedings of the trial in order to heal the souls whom they have poisoned by their deadly persuasion. Do you want us, in reading the proceedings, if they are going to contain the bloody punishment of these people, to be afraid to come to their end, where we indicate our awareness of them, for fear that those who have suffered may be thought to have returned evil for evil? If, then, there were no other means established to curb the malice of the wicked, extreme necessity might perhaps urge that such men be put to death, though, in our view, if no milder punishment could be imposed on them, we would prefer that they be released rather than that the sufferings of our brothers be avenged by the shedding of their blood. But now since some means can also be taken to show that the Church is meek and to check the audacity of the brash, why do you not yield in favor of the more foresighted and gentler sentence, as

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1. See Rom 13:4.

judges are permitted to do even in cases not pertaining to the Church? Fear, then, along with us the judgment of God the Father, and teach the forbearance of our mother. For, when you do so, the Church does it on whose account you do it and as whose son you do it. Use goodness to contend with the evil. They tore members from a living body by their cruel crime; by your act of mercy cause their members, which they used for wicked actions, to be by their wholeness of service for some good work. They did not spare the servants of God who preached to them the need for amendment; spare those who have been arrested; spare those who have been brought to trial; spare those who have been proven guilty. They spilled Christian blood by their impious sword; on account of Christ hold back from their blood even the sword of judgment. They killed a minister of the Church and took from him a period of his life; allow a period of repentance to the living enemies of the Church. You ought to act as a Christian judge in a case concerning the Church when we beg you, warn you, and intercede with you. When their convicted enemies are treated rather gently, men usually appeal against a milder sentence, but we love our enemies so that, if we do not presume too much upon your Christian obedience, we appeal against your severe sentence. May almighty God preserve Your Excellency in greater power and happiness, my noble and rightly exalted lord and most excellent son.

## Letter 135

In 411 or 412 Volusian, the brother of Albina and uncle of Melania the Younger, wrote to Augustine with various questions after Augustine invited him to do so in Letter 132. Volusian described the gatherings of friends in Carthage and the sorts of questions that were raised in their discussions (paragraph 1). One of the men in the gathering posed questions about the incarnation and about the miracles that Christ worked. Volusian insists with Augustine that his reputation is at stake if he refuses to answer or cannot answer these questions (paragraph 2).

*To my truly holy lord and rightly venerable father, Augustine, Volusian sends greetings.*

1. You, a man of goodness and an example of righteousness, ask me to question you on some ambiguous passages of scripture in order that I might be taught in a learned manner. I accept the gracious task imposed on me, and I willingly present myself for your instruction, following the authority of the ancient opinion which believes that no age is ever too old for learning.<sup>1</sup> Nor is it without reason that a wise man confines his pursuits of wisdom by no limits and no boundary, since virtue, far from its beginnings, never so reveals itself to those who pursue it that the whole of it lies open to be known. O truly holy lord and rightly venerable father, it is worth the effort to recall the conversation that we recently had. We were present at certain gatherings of friends, and many views were expressed there in accord with our various talents and interests. The topic was, nonetheless, the rhetorical distribution of parts in a discourse. I speak to someone who knows about that. For you also taught this a little before. Others favored the art of poetry and lauded it to the skies. You do not leave even this part of eloquence unmentioned and without honor, as the poet appropriately sings:

For you the ivy creeps among your laurels of victory.<sup>2</sup>

They spoke of the great ornament in the arrangement of parts, the charm of metaphor, and the great loftiness of comparison. They spoke of light and smooth verses and, as I said, the harmonious variety in the divisions of lines. Then the talk turned to philosophy, with which you are familiar and which you yourself are accustomed to cultivate as esoteric in the manner of Aristotle.<sup>3</sup> We were also asking about the achievement of the teacher from the Lyceum,<sup>4</sup> about the

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1. See Plautus, *The Aggressor (Truculentus)* 22.

2. Virgil, *Eclogues (Eclogae)* VIII, 13.

3. PL has "as Isocratic" in place of "as esoteric." If one adopts that reading, the expression would mean that Augustine teaches the wisdom of Aristotle with the eloquence of Isocrates, the great Athenian orator.

4. That is, Aristotle.

multiple and prolonged doubt of the Academy, about the dialectician from the Stoa,<sup>5</sup> about the learning of the natural philosophers, about the pleasure of the Epicureans, about the endless passion for argument among them all, and about the truth that is known less after one has presumed that it can be known.

2. While our conversation delayed over these ideas, one of the many asked, "And who is perfectly imbued with the wisdom of Christianity who can resolve certain ambiguous points on which I am stuck and can strengthen my hesitant assent with true or probable grounds for belief?" We were stunned and silent. Then he suddenly burst forth with this: "I wonder whether the Lord and ruler of the world filled the body of an inviolate woman, whether she endured those long annoyances over ten months,<sup>6</sup> and whether, though a virgin, she nonetheless had the child in the ordinary manner of giving birth and after this her virginity remained intact." And after this, he added other things: "Is he to whom the universe is not considered equal hidden within the tiny body of a wailing infant? Does he endure the years of childhood, grow up, and attain the strength of a man? Is that ruler absent for so long from his kingdom, and has the governance of the whole world passed into one little body? Finally, does he fall asleep? Is he nourished by food? Does he feel all the emotions of mortals? Nor were any proofs of so great a majesty revealed by any suitable signs, for that hidden purification,<sup>7</sup> the curing of the ill, the restoration of life to the dead, and whatever other things we might think of, are too insignificant for God." We interrupted him though he had further questions and, after the gathering was ended, referred the questions to someone of greater expertise for fear that, when mysteries are imprudently violated, harmless error might be turned into sin. There you have, O man capable of every honor, my confession of ignorance. You recognize what is desired on your part. It is a matter of interest for your reputation that I come to know the answers to my questions, because ignorance may somehow or other be tolerated in other priests without harm to the worship of God, but when it comes to Augustine, the bishop, whatever he may happen not to know is a failing in what is right. May the highest divinity keep Your Reverence safe and sound, my truly holy lord and rightly venerable father.

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5. That is, Zeno of Citium.

6. See Virgil, *Eclogues (Eclogae)* IV, 61.

7. This may refer to the expulsion of demons.

## Letter 136

In 411 or 412 Marcellinus, the imperial commissioner, wrote to Augustine to convey to him further questions posed by Volusian besides those mentioned in the preceding letter. Marcellinus points out the questions about the incarnation that have been frequently raised in discussions in Carthage and about Christ's miracles being no better than those of Apollonius or Apuleius (paragraph 1). Volusian also argues that Christ ought not to have replaced the sacrifices of old with new ones and claims that the teaching of Christ is inimical to the practices of the state, which has suffered under the Christian emperors (paragraph 2). Hence Marcellinus urges Augustine to write a full and well thought out response to the claim that Christianity is harmful to the state (paragraph 3).

*To Augustine, my very venerable father singularly worthy of honor and of every service from me, Marcellinus sends greetings.*

1. The illustrious lord, Volusian, read to me the letter of Your Beatitude; in fact, at my insistence, he read it to many others. I thoroughly admired what you said, though everything you say is truly admirable. For the charm of the word of God with its proud lowliness shone forth so that it easily won acceptance by all. It was most acceptable because you strive to hold upright and to strengthen the somewhat tottering steps of the man by an exhortation toward a good way of life. For we have a daily discussion with the same man in accord with our abilities and the poverty of our mind. In fact, driven by the entreaty of his holy mother, I take care to call upon him rather frequently, though in this respect he also deigns to reciprocate. But after he received the letter of Your Reverence, Volusian, who is held back from the stability of the true faith by the persuasion of many, of whom there is an abundance in this city, was so moved that, if, as he himself states, he had not feared to be verbose in writing, he would have presented to Your Beatitude every doubt he had. But, as you yourself will also be able to see, he has demanded in a cultivated and precise language and with the clear splendor of Roman eloquence that you resolve some questions in summary fashion. This question has been examined again and again, and in this area the cleverness of those people is well known who disparage the plan of God in the incarnation of the Lord. But because in this area I am confident that whatever you write in reply will be beneficial to very many, I want to approach you with my petition that you may deign to reply with greater care to those objections by which they falsely claim that the Lord did nothing more than other human beings were able to do. In fact, they set before us their Apollinius<sup>1</sup> and

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1. Apollinius of Tyana was a philosopher who lived in the first century after Christ. In his biography by Philostratus he was portrayed as having much the same temperament as Christ and as having worked various miracles.



Apuleius<sup>2</sup> and other practitioners of the arts of magic, and they claim that their miracles are greater.

2. The illustrious man mentioned above said, however, in the presence of a certain number of people that there are many questions that could with reason be added to this, as I already said, if for his part the brevity of a letter would not be a consideration. Though he was unwilling to write them, he did not permit them to remain unspoken. For he said that, even if one today gave a reason for the incarnation of the Lord, one could hardly give a clear reason why this God, who is also maintained to be the God of the Old Testament, took delight in the new sacrifices after having rejected the old ones. For he claimed that one can only correct what is shown to have previously been done incorrectly and that what was once done correctly ought in no way to have been changed. For he said that one cannot but unjustly change things that were done correctly, especially since this variation could charge God with being fickle. Moreover, the preaching and teaching of Christ is in no way compatible with the practices of the state, since, as many say, it is clear that it is his commandment that we should repay no one with evil for evil,<sup>3</sup> that we should offer the other cheek to one who strikes us, give our coat to one who insists on taking our cloak, and go twice the distance with someone who wants to force us to go with him.<sup>4</sup> He states that all these are contrary to the practices of the state. For who would permit an enemy to take something from him or would not want to redress evil by the right of war against a plunderer of a Roman province? And there are other things that Your Reverence understands can be said against other commandments. He, therefore, thinks that all these points can be added to that one question insofar as it is evident that such great evils have befallen the state through Christian princes who for the most part have observed the Christian religion, even if he says nothing about this aspect.

3. Hence, as Your Beatitude is so good as to recognize along with me, since the response of Your Holiness, which we desire, will undoubtedly be passed on to the hands of many, you ought to present a brilliant solution to all these objections that is both full and well thought out, especially since, when these events were taking place, a wealthy landowner and lord from Hippo Regius was present, who praised Your Holiness with ironic flattery and claimed that, when he was asked about these questions, he was hardly satisfied. But I am not unmindful of your promise, but rather demand its fulfillment, and I beg that in answer to all these objections you compose books that will be of extraordinary benefit to the Church, especially at this time.<sup>5</sup>

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2. Apuleius of Madauros, Numidia, was a second-century philosopher and writer who was accused of using magic to win the hand of a woman in marriage.

3. See Rom 12:17.

4. See Mt 5:39.

5. Augustine began *The City of God* within a year in order to deal with these questions.

## Letter 137

Shortly after the previous letter, in 411 or 412, Augustine replied to Volusian's questions posed in Letter 135 as well as to those forwarded by Marcellinus in Letter 136. Augustine tells Volusian that he is eager to answer his questions in order that his splendid talents might be used in the defense of the faith (paragraph 1). Augustine repeats Volusian's questions regarding how the ruler of the world could become incarnate in the confines of Mary's womb and why appropriate miracles were not produced as proof of such an event (paragraph 2). Augustine turns aside the compliments that Volusian paid to his learning and insists that, given the profundity of scripture, he remains always like a beginner (paragraph 3). Augustine explains that, if one is going to think of the incarnation, one must not suppose that God is a body (paragraph 4). He uses the senses of sight and hearing to illustrate how puzzling such senses are and compares them with the other three, which are more dependent upon the body (paragraphs 5 and 6). He compares the omnipresent and eternal Word of God to our spoken words that pass away (paragraph 7). Because the Word of God is not great in bodily mass, but in power, he was not cramped in the body of an infant. If an explanation is given, it will cease to be a miracle; if other examples are given, it will cease to be singular (paragraph 8).

If the Word made flesh did not have fully human traits, he would have given support to the error that he had not assumed a true man, uniting the two natures in the oneness of his person (paragraph 9). The Word in the beginning, by whom times were made, chose the time to assume flesh, but was not turned into flesh (paragraph 10). As body and soul are united to make one human person, so the man and the Word are united in Christ to make the one person of Christ (paragraph 11). The Word incarnate came to us human beings both to teach us the truth and to provide us with the help to overcome concupiscence by his grace (paragraph 12).

To the objection that Christ did not have miracles that surpassed those of the Jews and of the Egyptians, Augustine points out that it was fitting that Christ perform the same sort of miracles that were worked by his prophets and that he has as miracles proper to himself his birth from the virgin, his resurrection, and his ascension (paragraph 13). These objectors do not believe the miracles of Christ that are greater than what others have worked and dismiss those comparable to the miracles of others as unworthy of him (paragraph 14). The whole history of the Jewish people and their prophets point to Christ who came in the flesh and through his life, death, and resurrection fulfilled all the prophecies (paragraph 15). The growth of the Christian religion, despite persecution and heresy, offers further proof of its truth (paragraph 16).

Christ's twofold commandment of love of God and of neighbor embodies all the wisdom of philosophy and safeguards the well-being of the state (paragraph 17). Scripture is accessible to all because of its lowliness, though only a very few penetrate its secret depths (paragraph 18). Augustine urges Volusian to write to

him with further questions (paragraph 19) and reminds him that Christians look forward to the full happiness of the heavenly city (paragraph 20).

*To his illustrious lord and rightly excellent and outstanding son, Volusian, Augustine sends greetings in the Lord.*

1. I read your letter in which I saw an example of a certain important dialogue summed up with praiseworthy brevity. I ought, therefore, to have replied and not to have set forth an excuse for delay. For it fortunately turned out that I was free from other tasks for a time. I decided, however, to spend this period of leisure on dictating it, but I postponed it a little, though I thought that it was hardly just that I should put off a questioner whom I myself had encouraged to ask questions. But who of us who are ministers of the grace of Christ in accord with our ability, after reading your words, would want you to be instructed in Christian doctrine so that it is enough for you alone, not for the well-being of this life, which the word of God was careful to warn is like a mist that appears for a little while and then fades away and is gone,<sup>1</sup> but for that well-being for whose attainment and eternal possession we are Christians? It is, therefore, not enough for us that you be instructed so that it suffices to set you free. Your talent and eloquence, which are so excellent and so splendid, should, of course, also benefit others. For against their slowness or misguidedness the dispensation of so great a grace is most opportunely defended, though proud little souls place no value on it who pretend that they can do very much but can do nothing to heal or to hold in check their vices.

2. You ask, therefore, whether the Lord and ruler of the world filled the body of an inviolate woman, whether she endured those long annoyances over ten months,<sup>2</sup> and whether, though a virgin, she nonetheless had the child in the ordinary manner of giving birth and whether after this her virginity remained intact. You ask whether he to whom the universe is not considered equal was hidden within the tiny body of a wailing infant, whether he endured the years of childhood, grew up, and attained the strength of a man. You ask whether that ruler was absent for so long from his kingdom and whether the governance of the whole world passed into one little body. You finally ask whether he fell asleep, was nourished by food, and felt all the emotions of mortals. "Nor were any proofs of so great a majesty revealed by any suitable signs, for that hidden purification,<sup>3</sup> the curing of the ill, the restoration of life to the dead, and whatever other things we might think of, are too insignificant for God." You write that this question was introduced at a certain gathering of friends by one of the many who

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1. See Jas 4:15.

2. See Virgil, *Eclogues (Eclogae)* IV, 61.

3. This perhaps refers to the expulsion of demons.

were present, but that you interrupted him though he had further questions and, after the gathering was ended, referred the questions to someone of greater expertise for fear that, when mysteries are imprudently violated, harmless error might be turned into sin.<sup>4</sup>

3. Then you direct to me the aim of your letter, and after this admission of ignorance you advise me in order that I may know what is desired on my part. You also add that it is a matter of interest for my reputation that you come to know the answers to your questions, because ignorance may somehow or other be tolerated in other priests without harm to the worship of God, but when it comes to me, the bishop, whatever I happen not to know is a failing in what is right. First of all, then, I ask that you lay aside this opinion of me that you have too readily taken up and that you get rid of and strip off that attitude, though it is most well intentioned toward me, and believe me about myself rather than anyone else if you return my love. For the depth of the Christian writings is so great that I would daily make progress in them if I tried with the greatest leisure, the highest desire, and greater talent to master them alone from the beginning of boyhood up to decrepit old age.<sup>5</sup> It is not that one comes to those matters that are necessary for salvation with such great difficulty, but, though each person grasps in them the faith without which one does not live a pious and upright life, there remain to be understood by those making progress so many things, and things cloaked with so many shadows of mysteries, and there lies hidden so great a depth of wisdom, not only in the words by which they are stated in that way but also in the realities that are to be understood, that those who are the oldest, the most intelligent, and the most ardent with the desire to learn, experience what the same scripture says in another passage, *When a human being has come to the end, he is then at the beginning* (Sir 18:6).

2. 4. But why add more on this? Let us rather come to the issue about which you ask. Here I first want you to know that Christian doctrine does not hold that God was poured into the flesh with which he was born from the Virgin so that he either abandoned or lost the care of governing the universe or transferred that care, as if it were shrunk and compacted, to that little body. This is the understanding of human beings who can think of nothing but bodies, whether these denser ones like liquid or earth or the more subtle ones like air and light, but bodies in any case. None of them can be whole everywhere, because a body must have one of its countless parts here and another there, and however large a body might be or however small a particle might be, it occupies an area of place and fills that same place so that it is whole in no part of it. And for this reason, to become more dense or more rare, to contract and to expand, to be worn down to fragments and to grow into a large mass, are characteristics of bodies alone. The

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4. See Letter 135, 2.

5. See Cicero, *The Orator (De oratore)* I, 22.

nature of the soul is far different from that of the body; how much more different is that of God, who is the creator of both the soul and the body! God is not said to fill the world like water or air or the light itself so that he fills a smaller part of the world with a smaller part of himself and a larger part of the world with a larger part of himself. He is able to be whole everywhere and to be contained in no place; he is able to come without leaving where he was and is able to go away without abandoning where he came from.

5. The human mind wonders at this and, because it does not grasp it, it perhaps does not believe it either. Let it first examine and wonder at itself; let it, if it can, raise itself a little above the body and above those things that it is accustomed to perceive through the body. And let it see what it itself is that uses the body. But perhaps it cannot; a certain author says, "It is a mark of great intelligence to separate the mind from the senses and to withdraw thought from familiarity with them."<sup>6</sup> Let it, then, examine those senses of the body in a somewhat different way and with greater care. There are, of course, the five senses of the body, which cannot exist either without the body or without the soul, for to sense belongs only to a living being, and the body has life only from the soul. Nor do we see, hear, and use the other three senses without the instruments and, as it were, vessels and organs of the body. Let this rational soul also pay attention to this and consider the senses of the body, not by the senses of the body, but by the mind itself and reason. Certainly a human being cannot have sensation unless he is living, but he lives in the flesh before the two are separated by death. How, then, does the soul, which lives only in its flesh, perceive those things that are outside its flesh? Are not the stars in heaven very far removed from its flesh? Does the soul not see the sun in the sky? Or is to see not to sense, for among the five senses sight is more excellent than the others? Or does the soul also live in the sky since it senses in the sky, and a sense cannot exist where there is no life? Or does the soul sense even where it does not live since it lives only in its own flesh, but senses also in those places that contain those things besides its own flesh that it touches by sight? Do you see how obscure this is in so obvious a sense, which is called sight? Pay attention to hearing as well. For it too in some way pours itself out apart from the flesh. For why can we say, "There's a noise out there," unless we have sensation there where the noise is? We therefore also live there outside our flesh. Or can we sense even where we do not live, though our sense cannot exist without life?

6. The other three senses sense within themselves, though one can have some doubt about the sense of smell. But about taste and touch there is no controversy because we sense those things that we taste and touch nowhere but in our own flesh. Hence, let these three senses be removed from this consideration. Sight and hearing present an amazing question, namely, how the soul senses where it

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6. Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* (*Tusculanae Disputationes*) I, 16, 38.

does not live or how it lives where it does not exist. For it exists only in its flesh, but it senses also outside its flesh. It, of course, senses where it sees, because to see is also to sense. It senses where it hears, because to hear is also to sense. Either, then, it also lives there and for this reason also exists there, or it senses even where it does not live, or it lives even where it does not exist. All of these are amazing; none of them is able to be affirmed without some apparent absurdity, and we are speaking of a sense composed of dead tissue. What, then, is the soul itself apart from the sense of the body, that is, in the mind by which it considers these things? For it does not judge about the senses of the body by a sense of the body. And we think that we are told something incredible about the omnipotence of God when the Word of God, by whom all things were made,<sup>7</sup> is said to have assumed a body from the Virgin and appeared to mortal senses without destroying his immortality, changing his eternity, lessening his power, abandoning his governance of the world, or withdrawing from the bosom of the Father, that is, from that secret place where he is with him and in him!

7. Understand the Word of God through whom all things were made, not so that you think that something of him passes and from the future becomes the past. He remains as he is, and he is whole everywhere. But he comes when he is revealed, and he withdraws when he is hidden. He is nonetheless there, whether hidden or revealed, just as the light is there for the eyes of one with sight and of one who is blind. Yet the light is there for the one with sight as present, but it is there as absent for the one who is blind. A spoken word too is there for ears that hear; it is also there for those that are deaf, but is disclosed to the former and hidden for the latter. What, however, is more amazing than what happens in our shouts and sounding words, that is, in something quickly passing? For, when we speak, there is place not even for the second syllable unless the first has ceased to sound, and yet, if one hearer is present, he hears the whole of what we say, and if two are present, both hear the same amount, which is whole for each of them. And if a great number hears in silence, they do not diminish among themselves the sounds as if they were food, but every sound is both whole for all and whole for each individual. Now would it not be more incredible if the enduring Word of God did not offer to things what a passing word of a human being offers to the ears so that, just as a human word is heard at once as a whole by each individual, the Word of God is present as a whole everywhere at once?

8. There is no need to fear that so great a God might seem to have suffered confinement in the tiny body of an infant. For God is great not by mass but by power. He gave to little ants and bees rather than to donkeys and camels a sense more like foresight; he creates from the tiniest grain of seed greatness like that of the fig tree, though from much larger seeds many much smaller plants come to be. He expands a very small pupil by the gaze that shines forth from the eyes in a

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7. See Jn 1:1.3.

moment of time and surveys almost half the sky. From a point and as if from the center of the brain he pours forth all the senses in their fivefold distinction; by the heart, an organ so small, he dispenses vital motion throughout all of the body. By these and other such things he teaches great things from the very smallest, though he is not small in things that are small. For the very greatness of his power, which feels no confinement in anything confining, fertilized the virginal womb not with an infant coming from elsewhere but with one native to that womb. That same power joined to itself a rational soul and through it also a human body and the absolutely whole man that would be changed for the better without itself having been changed for the worse. This power deigned to take from it the name of humanity, while generously giving it the name of divinity. This power brought forth the members of the infant through the inviolate virginal womb of his mother, the same power that afterwards brought the members of the man through closed doors.<sup>8</sup> If a reason is asked for, it will not be miraculous; if an example is demanded, it will not be singular. Let us grant that God can do something that we admit that we cannot search out. In such cases the whole reason for what is done lies in the power of the agent.

3. 9. Now the very fact that he relaxes in sleep, is nourished by food, and feels all the human emotions convinces human beings that it is a man whom the Word does not consume but assumes. Look, it has happened in that way, and yet certain heretics who are wrongly amazed and who wrongly praise that power absolutely refuse to acknowledge in him a human nature in which there is the full proclamation of the grace by which he saves those who believe in him. For he contains in himself the deep treasures of wisdom and knowledge and fills minds with faith in order to bring them to the eternal contemplation of the immutable truth. Imagine if the almighty did not create the man, wherever he was formed, from the womb of his mother, but thrust him suddenly before our eyes! Imagine if he went through no ages from infancy to youth, if he took no food and did not sleep! Would he not confirm the opinion of that error, and would it not be believed that he did not in any way assume a true man, and would it not destroy what he did out of mercy if he did everything as a miracle? But now a mediator has appeared between God and human beings so that, uniting both natures in the unity of his person, he may raise up the ordinary to the extraordinary and temper the extraordinary to the ordinary.

10. But what does God do in all the movements of creatures that would not be marvelous if it had not grown common by daily familiarity? Also, how many familiar things are scorned that, if considered, are awesome! For example, who can approach with his mind, who can utter in speech what numbers are contained in the power of seeds, how lively, how productive, how hidden their power is, and how they fashion great things in something tiny? God, therefore, who also produces the

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8. See Jn 20:19.26.

seeds without seeds in the nature of things, produced a man for himself without seed. He, who without any change on his part framed the order of the ages by changing them, preserved in his body the rhythm of times and measured the sequences of the ages. For what began in time grew in time, but the Word in the beginning, through whom times were made, chose the time at which he would assume flesh; he did not yield to time in order that he might be changed into flesh. The man, of course, was added to God; God did not withdraw from himself.

11. But certain people demand that an account be given them of how God was united to the man in order to become the one person of Christ, though it was necessary that this happen only once. They do so as if they can give an account of something that happens daily, namely, of how the soul is united to the body in order that there might come about the one person of a human being. For just as the soul is united to the body in the unity of the person in order that a human being might exist, so God is united to the man in the unity of the person in order that Christ might exist. In the first person there is a union of soul and body; in the latter person, then, there is a union of God and man, provided that one who hears this abstracts from the usual behavior of bodies in which two fluids are usually mixed together so that neither retains its integrity, though even in bodies light is mingled with air without being corrupted. The person, therefore, of a man is the union of soul and body, but the person of Christ is the union of God and man. For, when the Word of God is united with a soul that has a body, he assumes at the same time both a soul and a body. The former event happens every day for the procreation of human beings; the latter happened once for the deliverance of human beings. The union of two incorporeal realities ought, nonetheless, to be believed with more ease than that of one incorporeal and one corporeal reality. For, if the soul is not mistaken about its nature, it grasps that it is incorporeal; much more is the Word of God incorporeal, and for this reason the union of the Word of God and the soul ought to be more believable than that of the soul and the body. But we experience the latter in ourselves; the former we are commanded to believe in Christ. But if we were commanded to believe each of them as equally beyond our experience, which of these would we more quickly believe? How would we not admit that two incorporeal realities could more easily be united than one incorporeal and one corporeal one, provided the term "union" or "mixture" is not applied to these things in an inappropriate manner on account of our familiarity with corporeal things, which are far different and are known in another way?

12. The Word of God, therefore, the Son of God coeternal with the Father, who is the power and wisdom of God,<sup>9</sup> reaches mightily from the highest limit of the rational creature to the lowest limit of the bodily creature and arranges all things with gentleness.<sup>10</sup> He who is present and hidden, never enclosed, never

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9. See 1 Cor 1:24.

10. See Wis 8:1.



divided, never swollen, but everywhere whole without any mass, assumed a man in a far different way from that in which he is present to other creatures, and he made from himself and that man the one Jesus Christ, the mediator of God and human beings. He is equal to the Father according to his divinity but less than the Father according to the flesh,<sup>11</sup> that is, according to the man; he is immutably immortal according to his divinity, which is equal to the Father, and mutable and mortal according to his weakness, which is akin to us. In that Christ, at the time which he himself knew was most suitable and which he had arranged before the ages, the Word came to human beings as a source of teaching and of help for attaining everlasting salvation. He came, of course, as a source of teaching in order that, once his authority became present also in the flesh, it might confirm those truths that were usefully uttered here before, not only by the holy prophets who spoke only the truth but also by the philosophers and the poets and authors of such literature who mingled many truths with errors, as no one can doubt. He did this on account of those who could not see and discern those truths in the inner truth itself, and that truth, even before it assumed the man, was present to all who were able to be partakers of it. But especially by the example of his incarnation he salutarily taught human beings. For most human beings, desirous of divinity, thought that they should approach God through the heavenly powers, which they supposed to be gods, and through various exercises of forbidden rites, not sacred but sacrilegious ones, with more pride than piety. Because of their kindred pride, the demons take for them in this matter the place of the holy angels. He persuaded human beings that they should know that God, whom they approached through intermediate powers, as if he were located far off, is so close to the piety of human beings that he deigned to assume a man and to be united with him in a certain way. In that way the whole man was joined to him as the body is to the soul, except that God is not changed into a composite subject to change, as we see both body and soul are. He came as a source of help, however, because without the grace of faith, which comes from him, no one can conquer his sinful desires and be purified by pardon and forgiveness if he has not conquered any that remain. With regard, then, to his teaching, what man however ignorant of what woman however lowly does not now believe in the immortality of the soul and the life to come after death? When the Assyrian, Pherecydes, was long ago the first to discuss this among the Greeks, he transformed Pythagoras of Samos, who was moved by the novelty of the argument, from an athlete into a philosopher. Now, as Maro says and we all see, the Assyrian spices spring up everywhere.<sup>12</sup> But with regard to the help of the grace, which is found in Christ, he is absolutely

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11. See 1 Tm 2:5.

12. See Virgil, *Eclogues (Eclogae)* IV, 25.

The leader by whom, if any traces of our sin remain,  
Once canceled, they will free the earth from endless fear.<sup>13</sup>

4. 13. "Nor," they say, "were any proofs of a great majesty revealed by any suitable signs, for that hidden purification, the curing of the ill, the restoration of life to the dead, and whatever other things we might think of, are too insignificant for God."<sup>14</sup> We too admit, of course, that the prophets have done certain things of the sort. For among these signs what is more excellent than that the dead rose? Elijah did this;<sup>15</sup> Elisha did this.<sup>16</sup> For with regard to the miracles of the magicians, let those men see whether they raised the dead who try to prove Apuleius guilty not by accusing him but by praising him, as he defends himself at great length against the charges of engaging in the arts of magic. We read that the magicians of the Egyptians, men most skilled in these arts, were surpassed by Moses, the servant of God, for, when they produced certain wonders by their wicked arts, he simply called upon God and destroyed all their devices.<sup>17</sup> But Moses himself and the rest of the most truthful prophets foretold Christ the Lord and gave great glory to him. They announced beforehand that he would come, not as someone equal to themselves, nor as someone superior in the same power of working wonders, but clearly as the Lord, the God of all, and as having become a man for the sake of human beings. He himself afterwards also chose to work such miracles so that it would not seem strange if he did not do in person what he had done through them. But he ought also, nonetheless, to have done some things singularly his own: to be born of a virgin, to rise from the dead, to ascend into heaven. I do not know what more anyone expects who thinks that this is something too insignificant for God.

14. For I think that they demand such miracles as the Word ought<sup>18</sup> not to have done after having become man. For *in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and through him all things were made* (Jn 1:1). Ought he, after he had assumed the man, have made another world in order that we might believe that he was the one through whom the world was made? But neither a greater world nor one equal to this one could have been made in this world. If, however, he made a smaller one within this world, this also would likewise be considered too insignificant. Because, then, he ought not to have made a new world, he made new things in this world. For a man born of a virgin, risen from the dead into eternal life, and exalted above the heavens is perhaps a work of greater power than the world itself. Here they may reply that they do not believe that this has happened. What, then, is one to do with human

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13. Virgil, *Eclogues (Eclogae)* IV, 13-14.

14. Letter 135, 2.

15. See 1 Kgs 17:22.

16. See 1 Kgs 4:35.

17. See Ex 7-8.

18. I have followed PL which inserts a negative here.

beings who scorn actions that are smaller and do not believe those that are greater? They believe the restoration of life to the dead, because others have done this, and it is too insignificant for God. They do not believe the generation of his own flesh from a virgin and its being raised from the dead to eternal life above the heavens, precisely because no one has done this, and it belongs to God alone. And in this way "those actions that anyone supposes easy," not "to do," but to grasp, "he accepts without a problem, but he considers things beyond them as false and as lies."<sup>19</sup> Do not, I beg you, be like them.

15. These problems are discussed extensively, and every angle of the necessary questions is examined, discussed, and clarified, but faith opens the door for understanding, while unbelief closes it. Who is not moved to believe by the great sequence of events from the beginning and the order of the ages? For by past events they produce faith concerning present ones, and they confirm by more recent ones events of long ago. God chose one man from the people of the Chaldeans, a man endowed with most faithful piety,<sup>20</sup> to whom he disclosed the divine promises to be fulfilled in the last times after so long a series of the ages, and he foretold that all the nations would be blessed in his offspring. This man who worshiped the one true God, the creator of the universe, begot a son in his old age from his wife, whom sterility and old age had left absolutely without a hope of having a child.<sup>21</sup> From him there came a people of great numbers that became still larger in Egypt, where the divine plan, which became more and more visible as promises were fulfilled, had sent that family from lands of the East. A mighty people was brought forth from the slavery of Egypt with terrifying signs and wonders,<sup>22</sup> and after the nations of unbelievers were driven out, that people was brought into and established in the land of promise and even raised up to a kingdom. Then, as sin increased, the people often offended by sacrilegious boldness the true God who had conferred such great benefits upon them, and after having been scourged by various disasters and consoled by prosperity, they were brought to the incarnation and revelation of Christ. This Christ, the Word of God, the Son of God, would as God come in the flesh, die, rise, ascend into heaven; by his most powerful name he would have people devoted to him in all the nations. And in him believers would have the forgiveness of sin and eternal life. All this was announced beforehand by all the promises, by all the prophecies, by the priesthood, by the sacrifices, by the temple, and by absolutely all the sacraments of that people.

16. Christ came; in his birth, life, words, deeds, sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension all the predictions of the prophets are fulfilled. He sends the Holy Spirit and fills the believers gathered together in one house, who were

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19. Sallust, *The War against Catiline (Bellum Catilinae)* III, 2.

20. See Gn 12:2.

21. See Gn 21:2.

22. See Ex 13:17.

awaiting this very promise in prayer and desire. But, filled with the Holy Spirit, they immediately speak in the languages of all peoples, confidently refute errors, preach the most salutary truth, exhort people to repentance over a sinful past life, and promise the pardon of divine grace. Appropriate signs and miracles follow upon the preaching of piety and the true religion. Savage unbelief is aroused against them; they suffer what has been foretold, hope for what has been promised, and teach what has been commanded. Few in number, they are scattered throughout the world; they convert peoples with an amazing ease; they are increased in the midst of enemies; they grow with persecutions; through the trials of affliction they spread out to the ends of the earth. From the most ignorant, from the most lowly, from very few they become enlightened, ennobled, and many. They subject to Christ the most brilliant minds, most cultivated tongues, and the marvelous expertise of the clever, the eloquent, and the learned, and they convert them to preach the way of piety and salvation. In alternating times of adversity and of prosperity they vigilantly practice patience and temperance. As the world moves toward its end and announces the final age by the exhaustion of everything, they more confidently await the eternal happiness of the heavenly city, because this too has been predicted. And amid all these events the unbelief of the impious nations roars against the Church of Christ, but the Church triumphs by suffering and by professing its unshaken faith in the midst of the ferocity of its enemies. As the sacrifice of the revealed truth takes their place, the sacrifices that were long veiled by mystical promises are done away with through the destruction of the temple itself. The people of the Jews, rejected because of their unbelief, is removed from their homeland and scattered in every direction through the world in order that it might carry everywhere the holy texts and, in that way, the testimony of the prophecy that foretells Christ and the Church. And so that we would not be thought to have made up this testimony for the occasion, our adversaries bring forth the very books that foretold that they themselves were not going to believe. The temples and images of the demons and their sacrilegious rites are gradually and one by one overthrown according to the predictions of the prophets. Heresies against the name of Christ, but under the veil of Christ's name, spring up to test the teaching of the holy religion, as they were foretold. As we read that all these events were predicted, so we see that they have been fulfilled, and we await the realization of those very many and very great events that remain. Finally, what mind eager for eternity and moved by the brevity of the present life would struggle against the brightness and loftiness of this divine authority?

5, 17. What arguments, what writings of any philosophers, what laws of any cities are in any way to be compared with the two commandments upon which Christ says that the whole law and the prophets depend?<sup>23</sup> *You shall love the*

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23. See Mt 22:40.

*Lord your God with your whole heart and your whole soul and your whole mind, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself* (Mt 22:37.39). In these you find natural philosophy, because all the causes of all natures are in God the creator. In these you find moral philosophy, because the good and moral life receives its character from nothing else than when those things that are to be loved are loved as they ought to be, that is, God and the neighbor. In these you find logic, because the truth and light of the rational soul is God alone. In these commandments there is also found the praiseworthy safety of the state, for the best city is established and protected only by the foundation and bond of faith and solid harmony when the common good is loved, namely, God, who is the highest and truest good, and when human beings love one another in complete sincerity in him by loving one another on account of him from whom they cannot hide the disposition with which they love.

18. But you see how accessible to all is the very style in which scripture is composed, though very few can enter deeply into it. Like a close friend, it speaks without pretense those clear ideas it contains to the heart of the unlearned and of the learned. It does not exalt those things that it conceals in mysteries with a proud language to which the sluggish and untrained mind dares not approach, as a poor man dares not approach a rich one, but invites all with its lowly language. And it not only feeds them with the evident truth but also exercises them with the hidden truth, though it has the same truth in clear matters as in hidden ones. But so that obvious truths do not become boring, the same truths are again desired as concealed, and as desired are in a sense refreshed, and as refreshed they are taught with sweetness. By these, evil minds are salutarily corrected, little minds are fed, and great minds are delighted. That mind is an enemy to this teaching that either because it is in error does not know that it is most salutary or hates its medicine because it is ill.

19. You see how lengthy I have made this letter. If, then, something bothers you and you consider it important that we thoroughly examine it, let the limit of ordinary letters not impose strict boundaries upon you, as if such a limit must be observed. For you know very well how long the ancients made their letters when they dealt with something that they could not explain briefly. And if the custom of authors who pertain to secular literature is different, the authority of our authors has been presented to us as more worthy of imitation in this matter. Look, then, at the style of the letters of the apostles or even of the writers who have commented on those words of God, and do not hesitate to propose many questions if many trouble you or to develop at somewhat greater length what you are asking in order that, to the extent that this is possible for such persons as we are, no cloud of doubt may remain to block the light of the truth.

20. For I know that Your Excellency endures the most stubborn opposition of certain persons who think or want it to be thought that the Christian teaching is not suited to the benefit of the state because they do not want the state to be estab-

lished on the solidity of its virtues but on the impunity of its vices. But it is not the case that the sins of many also remain unpunished with God,<sup>24</sup> as they do with a human king or any leader of a city. God's mercy and grace preached to human beings through the man Jesus Christ, but imparted by God and the Son of God, who is the same Christ, does not abandon those who live from faith and worship him with piety, whether they patiently and bravely experience the evils of this life or mercifully and temperately make use of its goods. In return for both they are destined to receive their eternal reward in the city of God above, where one will no longer endure disasters with difficulty and rein in desire with a struggle, but will maintain without any difficulty and with perfect freedom the love alone of God and neighbor. May the most merciful omnipotence of God keep you safe and ever more happy, my illustrious lord and rightly glorious and most excellent son. In accord with your merits I most dutifully greet your holy mother, who is most worthy of honor in Christ; may the Lord hear her prayers for you. My holy brother and fellow bishop, Possidius,<sup>25</sup> heartily greets Your Excellency.

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24. See Lucan, *The Civil War (De bello civili)* V, 260.

25. Possidius was bishop of Calama and later wrote the first biography of Augustine.

## Letter 138

In 411 or 412 Augustine wrote to Marcellinus, replying to Letter 136, in which the imperial commissioner asked him to answer the questions of Volusian. Augustine explains why he is sending the answers to Volusian's questions to Marcellinus (paragraph 1). The first question asked how God could have replaced the sacrifices of the Old Testament with new ones, since, if the old ones were correct, they ought not to have been changed. Augustine points to examples of changing events coming from a single plan (paragraph 2). A physician's art does not change because he prescribes a different treatment at a different age of the patient (paragraph 3). Often it is right to change things that were rightly done differently in the past (paragraph 4). Augustine appeals to the difference between the beautiful and the fitting to show how the old sacrifices were fitting for the old times (paragraph 5). It is a mistake to think that God changed the sacrifices because he changed in terms of what he found pleasing (paragraph 6). Furthermore, the prophets of the Old Testament predicted the sacraments of the new (paragraph 7). The sacraments that foretold Christ's coming differed from those that told of his having come, just as we have to change the verbs we use to speak of them (paragraph 8).

A second objection claimed that Christian meekness or gentleness was inimical to the practices of the state. Augustine cites against such a claim Roman authors who endorsed the forgiveness of injuries (paragraph 9). Christian mercy and harmonious unity provide the best foundation for the state (paragraph 10). In particular, the Christian commandment of not returning evil for evil is defended (paragraph 11). Augustine interprets the commandment about turning the other cheek (paragraph 12) and points out that neither Jesus nor Paul observed it literally (paragraph 13). Such commandments about patience must always be observed in the disposition of one's heart, but it is often necessary to act in a way that might seem harsh (paragraph 14). Christ's teaching is not opposed to all forms of war (paragraph 15).

To those who claim that the Roman state has suffered under the Christian emperors, Augustine replies that according to Roman authors the morals of the Roman state began to deteriorate long before the times of the Christian emperors (paragraph 16). Christ came to teach the practice of the virtues not merely for the good of the earthly society but especially for the attainment of the kingdom of heaven (paragraph 17).

It is ridiculous to compare Apollonius, Apuleius, and other magicians to Christ, but it is more tolerable than to compare their gods to Christ (paragraph 18). Apuleius was unable to attain by his magic even an earthly happiness (paragraph 19). In no case can the miracles of such pagans be compared to those of the prophets, much less to those of Christ (paragraph 20).

*To my excellent lord and rightly noble, most dear and most beloved son, Marcellinus, Augustine sends greetings in the Lord.*

1. To the illustrious man, Volusian, who is most eloquent and most dear to us, I was obliged to reply only to the question he thought he should ask. But to those other questions you sent in your letter for me to discuss and resolve, whether they are suggested or posed by him or also by others, they should be sent rather to you, once they have been discussed and resolved in accord with our abilities, not in the way one would have to deal with them in the labor of writing a book, but in a way that can suffice for a conversation by letter, so that, if it seems good to you who experience what disturbs them from daily discussions with them, this letter may be read to them. But if this discussion does not suffice for their ears, which are less cultivated in the piety of the faith, let us first thoroughly discuss among ourselves what you think suffices and then present to them what we have thoroughly discussed. For, if there are many points which their thinking still abhors and shrinks from, it might perhaps be possible at some point to persuade them either by a richer and more subtle reasoning or at least by an authority which they would think it improper to oppose.

2. In your letter, therefore, you stated that certain people are troubled over "why this God, who is also maintained to be the God of the Old Testament, took delight in the new sacrifices after having rejected the old ones. For he [Volusian] claims that one can only correct what is shown to have previously been done incorrectly and that what was once done correctly ought in no way to have been changed. For he says that one cannot but unjustly change things that were done correctly."<sup>1</sup> I have copied these words from your letter into mine. If I wanted to reply to them at length, time would run out on me more quickly than examples of how the very nature of things and human actions have changed by a certain plan in accord with the opportunity of the times, and yet that same plan by which they are changed is unchanged. Let me mention a few of these in order that, after your attention has been in a sense awakened by these, it may then, once fully awake, run through many similar ones. Does not summer follow winter with gradually increased warmth? Do not the hours of night turn to day? How often our ages change! Childhood yields to adolescence and will not return; youth follows adolescence and will not last; old age brings youth to an end and ends with death. All these change, but the plan of divine providence, which causes them to change, is not changed. When, however, the farmer gives different orders in the summer than he had given in the winter, the knowledge of agriculture is not changed. And when a man gets up in the morning who went to bed at night, he has not changed his plan of life. A teacher assigned a different task to an adoles-

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1. Letter 136, 2.



cent than to a boy; the doctrine, therefore, remaining constant, changed the assignment<sup>2</sup> by changing the directive, without itself having been changed.

3. That great physician of our times, Vindician,<sup>3</sup> when consulted by someone, ordered the application to the man's pain of a treatment he thought fitting at the time; health followed upon its application. Then, after some years when the same condition of his body recurred, the man thought that this same treatment should be applied; when he applied it, the condition worsened. In amazement he returned to the physician and indicated what happened. But as that physician was highly intelligent, he replied, "You were made worse because I did not prescribe this," so that all who heard him and did not understand the man well enough thought that he was not relying upon the art of medicine, but upon some evil power. Hence, when he was later questioned by certain amazed individuals, he revealed what they had not understood, namely, that he would no longer have prescribed this treatment for that age. Though the theory and the arts are not themselves changed, what must be changed in accord with them for the different times is very important.

4. That statement is not, therefore, true that what was once done correctly should in no way be changed. When the factor of time has, of course, changed, true reason generally demands that what had before been done correctly should be changed. Hence, when these people say that something was not done correctly if it is changed, the truth cries out just the opposite, namely, that something is not done correctly unless it is changed, because both of them will then be correct if they differ in accord with different times. For it can happen with different persons at one time that "it is permitted for this one to do" something "with impunity, but not permitted for that one, not because the action is different, but because the doer of the action is."<sup>4</sup> In the same way at one time something must be done and at another must not be done by the same person, not because he who does it is different from himself, but because the time is different.

5. Whoever is able and does not neglect to consider the difference between what is beautiful and what is fitting, something which is in a sense spread throughout the universe of things, sees, of course, what a wide application this question has. For the beautiful is considered and praised in itself; its opposite is the ugly and deformed. But the fitting, whose opposite is the unfitting, is dependent, as if tied to something else, and it is judged not by itself but by that to which it is linked. The proper and improper is, of course, the same or is evaluated in the same way. Come now, apply what we have said to the point with which we

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2. I have followed the NBA text, which follows Migne and the early editions, in adding "instructionem" which the CSEL text omits.

3. See *Confessions* IV, 3, 5-6 and VII, 6, 8. Vindician tried to persuade Augustine to give up his interest in astrology.

4. Terence, *The Brothers (Adelphoe)* 823-825.

are dealing. In previous times the sacrifice that God commanded was fitting, but now this is not the case. For he who knows much better than a human being what is suitably employed at any time has commanded another sacrifice, which is fitting for this time. As the immutable creator and governor of mutable things, he knows better than a human being what at a particular time he ought to give, add, remove, subtract, increase, or decrease until the beauty of the whole world, whose parts are those things that are suited for their own times, is played out like a great song of a certain ineffable artist, and until those who correctly worship God, even when it is a time for faith, pass from here into the eternal contemplation of vision.

6. But they who suppose that God commands these things for his own benefit or pleasure are mistaken, and they are rightly troubled as to why God changed these things, as if he ordered one thing to be offered to him in that previous time and another now because the source of his pleasure changed. But that is not the case. God commands nothing for his own benefit but for the benefit of the person to whom he gives the command. For this reason he is a true lord who does not need his servant and whom his servant needs. Indeed, in that scripture which is called the Old Testament and at that time when those sacrifices were still being offered that are not offered in this time, it was said, *I said to the Lord, "You are my Lord, because you do not need my goods"* (Ps 16:2). God, then, did not need those sacrifices either, nor does he ever need any. They are rather signs of gifts God has bestowed either for imbuing the soul with the virtues or for attaining eternal salvation, and by the celebration and performance of them we carry out acts of piety useful to us, not to God.

7. It would, however, take too long to discuss the variety of signs that are called sacraments when they pertain to the things of God. But, just as a man<sup>5</sup> is not mutable because he commands one thing in the morning and another in the evening, one thing in this month and another in that, and not the same thing this year as that, so God is not mutable because in the earlier age of the whole world he ordered that one sacrifice be offered to him and another at a later age. He did so in order that, without any change in himself, he might suitably display through changing times meanings that pertain to the most salutary teaching of religion. For those whom these objections disturb should know that this was already present in the divine plan and that, when these new sacrifices were established, he did not suddenly become displeased with the earlier ones as if his will were subject to change. Rather, this was already fixed and established in the very wisdom of God, to whom the same scripture says concerning even greater changes in things, *You shall change them, and they will be changed, but you are the selfsame* (Ps 102:27-28). For this purpose we must teach them that this

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5. The early editions, with one exception, and the NBA text had *homo*: "man" in place of *deus*: "God;" which is found in the CSEL text.

change of the sacraments of the Old and New Testaments was predicted by the words of the prophets. For in that way they will see, if they can, that what is new in time is not new before God, who created times and possesses, outside of time, all the things that he has arranged in their particular times in accord with their differences. For in that psalm from which I quoted something when I was proving that God does not need our sacrifices, the psalmist says, *I said to the Lord, "You are my Lord, because you do not need my goods."* In the same psalm we read a little later in the person of Christ, *I shall not gather their assemblies of blood* (Ps 16:2.4), that is, of the sacrifices of animals, for which the assemblies of the Jews were previously gathered. And elsewhere scripture says, *I shall not accept calves from your hand nor goats from your herds* (Ps 50:9). And another prophet says, *See, the days will come, says the Lord, and I shall establish over the house of Jacob a new testament, not like the testament that I made with their fathers when I led them out of the land of Egypt* (Jer 31:31-32; LXX 38: 31-32). And there are on this point many other testimonies that foretold that God would do this, but to mention all of them now would take too long.

8. Here it has perhaps now been sufficiently proven that what was correctly established at one time can likewise be correctly changed at another by the act of the one making the change, yet without any change in his plan. For that plan is contained in its intelligible pattern where all things, which cannot exist simultaneously in time, exist simultaneously outside of time because times do not pass all at once. Someone may perhaps expect to hear from us the reasons for this change, but you know how long a task it would involve. We can, nonetheless, briefly state an idea that may perhaps suffice for a clever person. Christ was announced beforehand by certain sacraments when he was going to come; it was necessary that he be announced by other sacraments after he had come, just as now the difference in the events forces us who are speaking of it also to change the verbs, since "announce beforehand" is something other than "announce" and "when he was going to come" is something other than "after he had come."

2, 9. Now then, let us see what sort of an objection follows in your letter. For you added that they say that "the preaching and teaching of Christ is in no way compatible with the practices of the state, since it is clear that it is his commandment that we should repay no one with evil for evil,<sup>6</sup> that we should offer the other cheek to one who strikes us, give our coat to one who insists on taking our cloak, and go twice the distance with someone who wants to force us to go with him,"<sup>7</sup> all of which, they claim, are against the practices of the state. "For," they say, "who would permit an enemy to take something from him, or who would not want to redress evils by the right of war against a plunderer of a Roman prov-

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6. See Rom 12:17.

7. Letter 136, 2. See Mt 5:39.

ince?"<sup>8</sup> It would involve a great deal of work for me to refute these and similar words of people raising such objections or saying such things not as objections but as questions, if these discussions were not held among men with a liberal education. Hence, what need is there for us to sweat over this point any longer? Let us rather ask them how those men were able to govern and develop the republic, which they caused to become great and wealthy from small and poor, for they "preferred to pardon an injury received rather than to avenge it."<sup>9</sup> How did Cicero, in extolling his moral character, say to Caesar, who was certainly a ruler of the republic, that he was accustomed to forget nothing but injuries?<sup>10</sup> For he said this either as great praise or as great flattery. But if he said it as praise, he knew that Caesar was such a man; if, however, he said it as great flattery, he showed that the leader of a city ought to have been such a man as he falsely proclaimed him to be. What is it, however, not to repay evil with evil but to refrain from the desire for vengeance, that is, to prefer to pardon an injury received than to avenge it and to forget nothing but injuries?

10. When these things are read in their own authors, they cry out and applaud. They see that moral conduct is described and preached by which there would fittingly arise a city that might rule so many nations because the people preferred to pardon an injury received rather than to avenge it. But when they read that at the command of divine authority we should not repay evil with evil,<sup>11</sup> when this admonition, which is so salutary, is proclaimed, as if in public schools, from a higher source to congregations of people of both sexes and of all ages and ranks, religion is accused as an enemy of the state! If it were heard as is fitting, it would establish, consecrate, strengthen, and increase the state far better than Romulus, Numa, Brutus, and those other illustrious men of the Roman nation have. For what is the state but something belonging to the people?<sup>12</sup> It is, therefore, something common, something, of course, belonging to the city. But what is a city but a multitude of human beings brought into some bond of harmonious unity? Among those authors, after all, we read as follows, "A diverse and scattered multitude quickly became a city in virtue of harmonious unity."<sup>13</sup> They judged that these precepts of harmonious unity ought to be read in their temples, since those wretched people were forced to seek how they could, without offense to any one of them, worship their gods, who were in a state of discord with one another, for, if they chose to imitate them in their discord, the city would collapse

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8. *Ibid.*

9. Sallust, *The War against Catiline (Bellum Catilinae)* 52, 19.

10. Cicero, *In Defense of Ligarius (Pro Ligario)* 12, 35.

11. See Rom 12:17, 1 Thes 5:15, and 1 Pt 3:9.

12. See Cicero, *The Republic (De republica)* 1, 39. Both Cicero and Augustine appeal to the connection in Latin between state or republic (*res publica*) and something belonging to the people (*res populi*).

13. Sallust, *The War with Catiline* 6, 2.

once the bond of harmonious unity was broken, as afterwards began to happen through the civil wars, once the moral character of the people was marred and corrupted.

11. But who—even someone apart from that religion—is so deaf that he does not know the great commandments of harmonious unity, not derived from human discussions but written by divine authority, that are regularly read in the churches of Christ? For those commands also pertain to what they prefer to attack rather than learn, namely, that we should offer the other cheek to one who strikes us, that we should also give our cloak to one who wants to take our coat, and that we should go twice the distance with one who forces us to go with him. This is, of course, done in order that a bad person may be conquered by a good person: in fact, in order that evil may be conquered by good in a bad person, and that a person may be set free not from an external evil of another but from an inner evil of his own, by which he is ravaged more seriously and more destructively than by the cruelty of an enemy from outside. One, therefore, who conquers evil with good suffers the loss of temporal goods in order to teach how they are to be scorned in comparison to faith and righteousness. For by loving them the other person becomes evil, and in that way the one who does injury learns from the one to whom he does the injury the character of the things on account of which he did injury, and thus he is won over to harmonious unity, than which there is nothing more useful for the city, as repentant, conquered not by the strength of someone in a rage but by the goodwill of someone patient. For we are right to act in this way when we see that it benefits the person on account of whom we do it in order to produce correction and harmonious unity in him. We should certainly act with this spirit, even if another outcome results and the other person does not want to be corrected and subdued, though this medicine was applied to correct and subdue him, as if to cure and heal him.

12. Otherwise, if we pay attention to the words and think that we should observe their literal meaning, the right cheek should not be offered if the left cheek is struck, because he says, *If someone strikes you on the right cheek, offer him the left as well* (Mt 5:39). But the left cheek is more often struck because a blow from the right hand of the one who strikes is easier. But it is usually understood as if it said, “If someone has attacked what is better in you, offer him what is less good as well. Otherwise, in pursuit of vengeance rather than of patience, you might value eternal goods less than temporal ones, though temporal goods ought rather to be valued less than eternal ones, as things on the left are valued less than those on the right.” This was always the intention of the holy martyrs, for vengeance is justly demanded only in the end, when there no longer remains room for correction, that is, at the last and supreme judgment. But now we must beware that out of a desire for vengeance we do not lose, to mention nothing else, patience itself, which we should value more than everything that an enemy can take, even against our will. For another evangelist made no mention of the right

cheek in that saying, but only mentioned one cheek and the other<sup>14</sup> in order that we might understand somewhat more clearly the saying in the other evangelist, while he himself simply recommended patience. Every righteous and pious person, then, ought to be ready to endure with patience evils from those whom he wants to become good in order that the number of the good may rather increase and that he may not add himself by an equal sinfulness to the number of the evil.

13. In short, these commandments pertain to the disposition of the heart, which is something interior, rather than to action, which is something exterior. In that way we maintain patience along with goodwill in the secret of our soul while we do openly what is thought to be able to benefit those for whom we ought to will good. This is clearly shown from the fact that Christ the Lord himself, a singular model of patience, replied when he was struck in the face, *If I have spoken evil, rebuke me for the evil, but if I have spoken well, why do you hit me?* (Jn 18:23). If we look only at the words, then, he in no sense fulfilled the command. For he did not offer the other side to the one who struck him, but rather stopped him in order that the one who did this would not increase the injury, and yet he had come not only to be struck in the face but also to die on the cross, even for these men from whom he was suffering this abuse. For them he said on the cross, *Father, forgive them because they do not know what they are doing* (Lk 23:34). Nor does Paul the apostle seem to have carried out the command of his Lord and teacher when he too was struck in the face and said to the leader of the priests, *God will strike you, you whitewashed wall. You sit to judge me according to the law, and against the law you order me to be struck!* And when those standing around said, *You do an injury to the leader of the priests*, he wanted mockingly to admonish them by what he had said in order that the wise might understand that by the coming of Christ the whitewashed wall, that is, the hypocrisy of the Jews, was going to be destroyed. Indeed, he said, *I did not know, my brothers, that he was the leader. For scripture said, "You shall not curse the leader of your people"* (Acts 23:3-5). For, since he had grown up in the same people and was educated there by the law, he surely could not fail to know that he was the leader of the priests, nor would he ever in any way lead those who knew him to think that he did not know this.

14. We must, then, always keep those precepts of patience in the disposition of the heart, and we must always have benevolence in the will so that we do not return evil for evil.<sup>15</sup> But we also have to do many things, even against the will of people who need to be punished with a certain kind harshness, for we have to consider their benefit rather than their will, something which their writings have most richly praised in a leader of a city.<sup>16</sup> For in rebuking a child, no matter how

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14. See Lk 6:29.

15. See Rom 12:17, 1 Thes 5:15, and 1 Pt 3:9.

16. See Cicero, *The Republic (De republica)* 5, 8.

harshly, a father's love is surely never lost; he nonetheless does what the son does not want and causes pain to the son who, despite his unwillingness, he judges must be healed by pain. And for this reason, if this earthly state keeps the Christian commandments, even wars will not be waged without goodwill in order more easily to take into account the interests of the conquered with a view to a society made peaceful with piety and justice. For a person whose freedom for wickedness is taken away is conquered to his own benefit, because nothing is more unhappy than the happiness of sinners that nourishes their penal impunity and strengthens their evil will like an internal enemy. But the misguided and twisted hearts of mortals regard human affairs as happy when they look upon the splendor of their homes and do not see the collapse of their souls, when the great hulks of theaters are constructed and the foundations of the virtues are undermined, when there is a glorious madness in spending and the works of mercy are mocked, when actors live in luxury from the abundance of the rich and the poor have scarcely what is necessary, when God who cries out against this public evil by the public words of his teaching is blasphemed by impious people and they seek the sort of gods in whose honor those displays of the theater that dishonor bodies and souls are celebrated. If God allows these to flourish, then he is more seriously angry; if he let these go unpunished, then he punishes more severely. But when he overthrows the support of the vices and reduces the abundant passions to a state of poverty, he is mercifully opposed to them. For good men would wage even wars with mercy, if this were possible, in order that by taming licentious passions they might destroy these vices that a just empire ought either to wipe out or to suppress.

15. For, if Christian doctrine condemned all wars, it would rather be said in the gospel to the soldiers who sought advice about their salvation that they should cast aside their weapons and completely withdraw from the army. But they were told, *Do violence to no one; slander no one; let your wages suffice for you* (Lk 3:14). When he commanded that their own wages ought to suffice for them, he of course did not forbid them to serve in the army. Hence, let those who say that the teaching of Christ is opposed to the state give us an army of the sort that the teaching of Christ ordered soldiers to be. Let them give us such people of the provinces, such husbands, such wives, such parents, such children, such masters, such slaves, such kings, such judges, and finally such taxpayers and tax collectors as Christian teaching prescribes, and let them dare to say that this teaching is opposed to the state; in fact, let them not hesitate to admit that it would be a great boon for the state if this were observed.

3. 16. But why should I reply to their claim that many evils have befallen the empire through certain Christian emperors? This general complaint is slanderous. For, if they would more openly mention some things at least concerning past emperors, I could also mention similar things and perhaps more serious ones concerning non-Christian emperors so that they might understand that

these are failings of human beings, not of a teaching, or that they are not failings of emperors but of others without whom the emperors can do nothing. For the time when the Roman state began to go bad is clear enough; their own literature tells us. Long before the name of Christ shone forth on the earth, it was said, "O city for sale and destined soon to perish if it finds a buyer!"<sup>17</sup> In the book on the war with Catiline, certainly before the coming of Christ, the same most noble historian of theirs is not silent about when "the army of the Roman people first became used to making love, to drinking, to admiring paintings and decorated vases, to stealing them privately and publicly, to looting sacred and profane sites, and to polluting everything."<sup>18</sup> When, therefore, the greed and rapaciousness of corrupt and wicked morals spared neither human beings nor even those whom they considered gods, then there began to perish that praiseworthy glory and well-being of the state. It would take too long to state now the progress those most evil vices made and the very great evil of the human race by which that wickedness prospered. Let them hear their own satirical poet who speaks the truth as gossip.

Lowly fortune once kept the ladies of Latium chaste,  
 And no vice was allowed to touch the small homes  
 Because of hard work, little time for sleep, hands  
 Weary and hard from Tuscan fleece,  
 Hannibal near to the  
 City, and husbands standing guard on the Colline tower.  
 Now we suffer the evils of a long peace. Luxury  
 More savage than arms hovers over us and takes  
 Vengeance upon the world it has conquered.  
 No crime or outrage of desire is absent  
 Since Roman poverty perished. <sup>19</sup>

Why, then, do you wait for me to heap up the great evils that wickedness has introduced, once it was aroused by prosperous success, since the Romans themselves who paid attention with a little more wisdom saw that they should grieve more that Roman poverty rather than wealth has perished? For in that poverty the integrity of her morals was preserved, but through this wealth terrible wickedness worse than any enemy has broken, not through the walls of the city, but into the very minds of the citizens.

17. Thanks be to the Lord our God who sent us a singular help against these evils. For where would this river of the horrible wickedness of the human race not carry us, whom would it not sweep away, into what depth would it not plunge us, if the cross of Christ were not raised up on a greater height and with more

17. Sallust, *The War with Jugurtha* (*Bellum Jugurthinum*) 35, 10.

18. Sallust, *The War against Catiline* (*Bellum Catilinae*) 11, 6.

19. Juvenal, *Satire VI*, 287-295.



solidity on such a great mass of authority that we might stand firm, once we had grasped its wood, so that we would not be caught and pulled down by so vast a whirlpool of this world of people who offer us bad advice or drive us into sins? For in this filth of the foulest morals and of the destruction of the old discipline the heavenly authority ought most of all to have come and come to the rescue in order to persuade people to voluntary poverty, continence, benevolence, justice, concord, and true piety, and the other light-filled and powerful virtues of life. It ought to have done this not merely in order that people might lead this life with the greatest moral goodness, not merely for the sake of attaining the most peaceful society of the earthly city, but also for the sake of attaining everlasting salvation and the heavenly and divine republic of a certain everlasting people, to which faith, hope, and love admits us as citizens. Hence, as long as we are on a journey away from there, we endure, if we cannot correct, those people who want to maintain, without punishing the vices, the republic that the first Romans established and increased by the virtues, even though they did not have true piety toward the true God, which could also have brought them by the religion of salvation to the eternal city. They nonetheless preserved a certain goodness of its own kind that was able to suffice for establishing, increasing, and preserving the earthly city. For in that way God showed, in the most wealthy and renowned empire of the Romans, the great value of civic virtues, even without the true religion, in order that it might be understood that, with this religion added, human beings become citizens of another city, whose king is truth, whose law is love, and whose limit is eternity.

4. 18. But who would think it deserving of even a laugh that they try to compare or even to prefer Apollonius and Apuleius<sup>20</sup> and the other experts in the arts of magic to Christ? And yet we should regard it as more tolerable when they compare these men rather than their gods to Christ. After all, Apollonius was much better, we have to admit, than the patron and perpetrator of so many acts of impurity whom they call Jupiter. These, they claim, are fables. Still, then, they praise the luxurious, licentious, and clearly sacrilegious happiness of the state that invented these disgraceful actions of the gods, that not only wrote them down in fables to be listened to but displayed them in theaters to be seen. As a result, there are more crimes than deities there. The gods themselves are pleased to have these crimes presented to them, though they ought to have punished their worshipers because they even looked at them with patience. But, they say, they are not the gods themselves who are celebrated by the lies of such fables. Who, then, are they who are pleased by the celebration of such shameful deeds? Christian teaching is said to be opposed to the state because it has exposed the perversity and falsity of these demons by whom the arts of magic also deceive the minds of human beings, because it has revealed this to the whole world, because

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20. See Letter 136, 1 for Apollonius and Apuleius.

it distinguished the holy angels from their evil power, and because it warned that we must rather avoid these demons and be taught how to avoid them, as if we ought rather not to have chosen absolutely any form of unhappiness if temporal happiness were only to be obtained through them. But God did not want there to be any doubt on this point. He blessed with such great happiness in temporal affairs the first people who worshiped the one true God and scorned false gods as long as it was necessary that the Old Testament remain concealed in which there is a veil over the New Testament. In that way anyone might understand that this happiness did not lie in the power of demons but of him whom the angels serve and before whom the demons tremble.<sup>21</sup>

19. Apuleius, after all, in order to speak of one in particular who as an African is better known to us Africans, could not with all his magical arts attain I do not say a kingship but even some judiciary power in the state, though he was born to a noble position in his country, was liberally educated, and endowed with great eloquence. Or did he perhaps, as a philosopher, scorn these things, though as a priest of the province he considered it important to provide games, to equip those who fought with animals, and to bring a case to court against the opposition of certain citizens in order to erect a statue to himself in the city of Oea,<sup>22</sup> the city from which his wife came? In order that later generations might know this, he committed to writing the speech he gave for that case.<sup>23</sup> As far, then, as this temporal happiness goes, that magician was all he was able to be. Hence it is clear that he was nothing more, not because he did not want to be but because he could not be. And yet he defended himself most eloquently even against certain people who charged him with practicing the arts of magic.<sup>24</sup> Hence I am amazed that those who praise him and claim that he performed some miracles by those arts try to testify against his defense. But I leave it to them to figure out whether they themselves offer true testimony or he offered a false defense. If they hold the former, let those who acquire the arts of magic only, to be sure, for earthly happiness or out of damnable curiosity or who, while not practicing them, still praise them with a dangerous admiration, consider and see that our David rose to the royal dignity from being a shepherd of sheep without any such arts. The trustworthy scriptures are not silent about his sins and about his merits so that we might know how not to offend God and how to placate him if we have offended him.

20. But with regard to miracles that appear awesome to the human senses, they are greatly mistaken who compare magicians to the holy prophets, who are outstanding for the dignity of their great miracles. How much more are they

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21. See Jas 2:19.

22. That is, the modern Tripoli.

23. This speech has not survived.

24. Apuleius' defense is contained in his *Book on Magic in his own Defense (Pro se de magia liber)*.

mistaken if they compare them to Christ, who those prophets, to whom no magician should in any way be compared, foretold would come both in the flesh that he assumed from the Virgin and in the divinity in which he is never separated from the Father!

I see that I have produced a very long letter and have still not said about Christ everything that could suffice either for those who, because of a slower mind, cannot grasp the divine reality or for those who, though they are mentally sharp, are nonetheless prevented from understanding by a spirit of contentiousness and by the inveterateness of long-standing error. Learn, nonetheless, what moves them in the opposite direction, and write back to me in order that we may take care to reply to all their objections, either in letters or in books, if God grants his help. Be happy in the Lord by his grace and his mercy, my excellent and rightly noble lord and my dearest and most beloved son.

## Letter 139

At the end of 411 or the beginning of 412 Augustine asks that Marcellinus send him a copy of the proceedings of the Conference of Carthage held with the Donatists and that he make them public (paragraph 1). Augustine pleads with Marcellinus to use leniency in punishing the Donatists who have confessed to their crimes and not to impose the death penalty (paragraph 2). Augustine explains to his friend the amount of writing he has been forced to undertake, which keeps him from the works he would prefer to write (paragraph 3). Finally, he recommends to Marcellinus Bishop Delphinus and the care of the church in Numidia (paragraph 4).

*To my rightly illustrious lord and very dear and beloved son, Marcellinus, Augustine sends greetings in the Lord.*

1. I eagerly await the proceedings that Your Excellency has promised, and I desire that they be read out as soon as possible in the church of Hippo and, if possible, in all the churches established in the diocese in order that the people may hear and fully recognize that the Donatists confessed their wickedness, not because the fear of God compelled them to repent but because the diligence of the courts revealed the hardness of their most cruel hearts. Some of them confessed to the murder of a priest and the blinding and mutilation of his body; others have not dared to deny that they were able to know of these crimes, though they said that they disapproved of them. They fled from the Catholic peace as if in order to avoid being defiled by the sins of others, and they continued in that sacrilege of schism among so great a multitude of such savage criminals. Still others of them said that they would not withdraw from the Donatists, even after the Catholic truth and Donatist perversity had been proven to them. It is not something unimportant that God wanted to accomplish through your efforts. I wish that you would frequently hear such cases of theirs with the same result and that their crimes and insane stubbornness would be often revealed in the same way. But as for what Your Excellency wrote, namely, that you doubt whether you ought to order that proceedings be posted in the church of Theoprepia,<sup>1</sup> do it if a large number of people can gather there. Otherwise, you should look for another place that is more frequented, but you should not, nonetheless, pass this up.

2. I ask you that the punishment of those people, though they have confessed to such great crimes, may not involve the death penalty both on account of our conscience and for the sake of emphasizing Catholic gentleness. After all, we have obtained the benefit of their confession because the Catholic Church has

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1. A Donatist church in Carthage.

discovered a way to preserve and display leniency toward her fiercest enemies. In the case of such great cruelty, of course, any punishment whatsoever that is inflicted, short of death, will be seen as great leniency. Even if to certain of our people disturbed at their atrocities this seems insufficient and like weakness and negligence, the goodness of the Church will be seen in its exemplary brilliance, once the passions of the heart have subsided, which are often more wildly aroused by more recent events, and for this reason it will be a source of pleasure to read and to display the proceedings, my rightly illustrious lord and very dear and beloved son. My holy brother and fellow bishop, Boniface, is present in Carthage, and by means of the deacon, Peregrinus, who left with him, I have sent you my memorandum. Regard it as my presence with you. And whatever you decide in common for the good of the Church, let it be done with the help of the Lord, who is able to offer his help mercifully in the midst of such great evils. At present Macrobius, their bishop, surrounded by bands of wicked persons of both sexes, travels about here and there and has opened for himself basilicas that had been closed out of a fear, however slight, on the part of their owners. By the presence of Spondeus, the agent of the illustrious man, Celer,<sup>2</sup> whom I have recommended and recommend highly to Your Charity, their boldness was somewhat curtailed, but now, after he left Carthage, Macrobius has also opened basilicas on the country estates and gathers people to him. There is also with him that Donatist deacon who was rebaptized when he was a tenant farmer of the church and who was the principal figure involved in that slaughter. What criminals of that sort are not with him if that fellow is with him? If the proconsul<sup>3</sup> or both of you together are going to pronounce sentence against them and if he perhaps persists in his desire to impose capital punishment, although he is a Christian and, insofar as we have been able to observe, is not inclined to such bloodshed, nonetheless, if it is necessary, order that my letters that I thought I should send to you individually on this matter be added to the proceedings. For I often hear that it is in the power of the judge to mitigate the sentence and to punish more leniently than the laws command. But if he does not agree even to what I ask in my letter, let him at least grant that they may be taken into custody, and we will take care to make this request from the clemency of the emperor. Otherwise, the sufferings of God's servants, which ought to be something glorious in the Church, will be dishonored by the blood of their enemies. I know that in the case of the clerics of the Vale of Non,<sup>4</sup> who were killed by pagans and are now honored as martyrs, the emperor readily granted, upon being asked, that their killers who were captured and in prison should not be punished by a similar penalty.

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2. Perhaps the recipient of Letter 56.

3. That is, Apringius, Marcellinus' brother.

4. They were martyred in Italy near Trent.

3. I forget why I received back from you the book on the baptism of little ones,<sup>5</sup> after I had already sent the volume to Your Excellency, unless perhaps, when I looked at it, I found that the books were defective and wanted to correct them, something that I have as yet not been able to do, since I have been unusually prevented. You should know that the letter that I also wanted to write to you and to add to this, which I had already begun to dictate when I was there, is still unfinished, though there has been a small addition to it. But if I could give you an account of all the days and nights spent on other necessities, you would be gravely saddened and amazed at how those matters that absolutely cannot be postponed distract me and do not allow me to do those things toward which you urge me by your requests and admonitions, though I am willing and inexpressibly pained because I cannot do them. For, when I am somewhat free from the needs of those people who put constraints upon me so that I may in no way avoid them and must not hold them in contempt, I do not lack things to dictate, to which I give priority since they come up at such critical points of time that they do not permit delay. For example, I have the difficult summary of the proceedings of our conference since I saw that no one wanted to devote himself to reading so great a mass of writings.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, I also had the letter to those Donatist laymen concerning this same conference, which I have now finished after several nights.<sup>7</sup> So too, there were two letters and not short ones, one to Your Charity, the other to the illustrious gentleman, Volusian, which I believe you have received.<sup>8</sup> And also I now have in my hands a book for our Honoratus concerning five particular questions that he posed for me and conveyed to me by letter.<sup>9</sup> And you see how it is necessary that I reply to him immediately. After all, charity, which cherishes her children like a nurse, sets the weaker ahead of the stronger, not in loving them first, but in helping them first, and charity wants the weaker to become such as the stronger are now. She does not place no value on these latter, but for the time being passes them over because of her confidence about them. I cannot be free from such urgent necessities to dictate something, which keeps me from dictating those works that I desire much more ardently to write, when I get scarcely a little time in the midst of piles of work to which either the desires or the needs of others compel me and drag me off. And I do not know what to do.

4. You have heard the reasons why you should beseech the Lord along with me, but I also do not want you to cease from your persistent and frequent admonishing of me, since you are accomplishing something. I commend to Your Excellency the church located in Numidia; on account of its needs my holy

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5. That is, *The Punishment and Forgiveness of Sins and the Baptism of Little Ones*.

6. That is, *The Summary of the Conference with the Donatists*.

7. That is, *Answer to the Donatists after the Conference*.

8. That is, Letters 137 and 138.

9. That is, Letter 140, which is also called *The Grace of the New Testament*.

brother and fellow bishop Delphinus has been sent by my brothers and fellow bishops who are together there working and facing danger. I am not writing much on this topic since you are going to hear him when he arrives. You will find the rest in the memoranda that I sent to the priest either now or by means of the deacon, Peregrinus, so that it would not be necessary for me to repeat it so many times. May your heart always thrive in Christ, my rightly illustrious lord and very dear and beloved Son. I commend to Your Excellency our son, Rufinus, the chief magistrate of Cirta.

## Letter 140

In 411 or 412 Augustine wrote to Honoratus, a catechumen in Carthage, probably the same man for whom he wrote *The Advantage of Believing* in 391,<sup>1</sup> in order to answer five questions on various passages from the scriptures. Augustine adds a sixth question on the grace of the New Testament that he uses to tie together the answers to the other questions. In his *Revisions* Augustine calls this letter a book and says the following:

“At the same time when we were struggling intensely against the Donatists and had already begun to struggle against the Pelagians, a certain friend sent me five questions from Carthage and asked that I explain them to him in writing. They are: What does that cry, *My God, my God, why have you abandoned me* (Ps 22:2 and Mt 27:46), mean? And what do the words of the apostle mean, *In order that, rooted and grounded in love, you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, length, height, and depth* (Eph 3:17-18)? And what do the five foolish and five wise virgins symbolize?<sup>2</sup> What is the outermost darkness?<sup>3</sup> And how are we to understand, *The Word became flesh* (Jn 1:14)? But with my eye on the new heresy mentioned above, which is hostile to the grace of God, I posed for myself a sixth question on the grace of the New Testament. In discussing it, I interjected an explanation of the Twenty-First Psalm<sup>4</sup> in the beginning of which there are found the words that the Lord cried out on the cross, which that friend first of all proposed for me to explain. I resolved all those five questions, not in the order in which they were proposed, but as they were able to be fitted in, as if in their proper places, as I discussed the grace of the New Testament. This book begins as follows: ‘You proposed five questions for me to comment on’” (*Revisions* II, 36).

Augustine begins by telling Honoratus that he is not going to answer his questions in the order that they were posed, but is going to deal with them in relation to a sixth question concerning the grace of the New Testament (paragraphs 1 and 2). Augustine then distinguishes the life of temporal happiness from the life of eternal happiness, describing the soul’s mid-rank position between eternal goods and temporal bodily goods (paragraph 3) and explaining how the rational soul can come to the enjoyment of eternal goods through the good use of temporal goods (paragraph 4). In the Old Testament God used the blessings of temporal happiness to foreshadow the blessings of eternal happiness (paragraph 5). But in the fullness of time the grace hidden in the Old Testament was revealed in the New through the incarnation of the eternal Word (paragraph 6). John gave testimony to the true light by which the rational soul is illumined when it participates in that light (paragraph 7). The world that did not receive him is the non-believers, while those who received

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1. See *Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian* V, 26, where Julian seems to identify the Manichean Honoratus with the Honoratus with whom Augustine later corresponded.
  2. See Mt 25:2.
  3. See Mt 22:13.
  4. Augustine refers to the Psalms by their numbering in the Septuagint and Old Latin; this series refers to the Psalms by their numbering in the Hebrew scriptures.



him also received the power to become children of God (paragraphs 8 and 9). We become children of God by the grace of the Word, children by adoption, not by nature (paragraphs 10 and 11). We become partakers in the Word who became a complete man with both body and soul (paragraph 12). Through his death Christ the man showed that the grace of the New Testament lies not in temporal happiness, but in eternal life (paragraph 13).

On the cross Christ the man cried out, *My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?* (Mt 27:46), about which Honoratus had asked a question. Augustine explains that Christ spoke the words from Psalm 22, because he took up the cry of our weakness (paragraph 14). To show that this Psalm referred to him, he said in his own person something that belonged to the form of the servant, applying to himself the cry of his body, the Church (paragraph 15). The prolongation of this temporal life, which was one of the chief goods of the Old Testament, is something desired even by the saints of the New Testament (paragraph 16). The psalmist's cry of abandonment refers to God's abandoning him in terms of the well-being of the present life (paragraph 17). The words Christ uttered on the cross were spoken in the person of his body, the Church (paragraph 18).

God abandons us when he does not hear our prayers for retaining or acquiring temporal goods, but he does this in order that we might desire better things (paragraph 19). The grace of the New Testament offers us eternal goods, not temporal ones (paragraph 20). Augustine continues with the explanation of Psalm 22, giving a figurative interpretation of the words, *I am a worm and no man* (Ps 22:7), as applying to Christ as the Son of Man (paragraph 21). He continues to show how Christ is the Son of Man in contrast with Adam who was merely a man (paragraph 22) and appeals to other passages of scripture for the distinction between "men" and "sons of men" (paragraph 23). Verses 7 to 9 of the psalm foretold the insults suffered by Christ on the cross where he taught us what the grace of the New Testament is in order that we would seek eternal life (paragraph 24). By his resurrection he taught his own disciples what they should hope for in their resurrection (paragraph 25). Augustine compares the restoration of Job's temporal goods with the eternal goods that Christ promises us (paragraph 26).

Augustine also interprets the cry of abandonment of Christ on the cross as his making his own the words of his martyrs (paragraph 27). God abandons us in order that we may realize that we are Christians not for the happiness of this life but for that of eternal life (paragraph 28). Hence Christ our head made our words his own in order to teach us by his example to hold earthly goods in contempt (paragraph 29). Augustine continues his commentary on the psalm, interpreting verses 10 and 11, where the psalmist says, *From the womb of my mother you are my God*, first in reference to us and then in reference to Christ (paragraphs 30 and 31), while excluding an interpretation that might bear on the question of the soul's origin (paragraph 32).

The words, *Do not depart from me because trouble is very close* (Ps 22:12), show that God did not abandon the psalmist, except with regard to temporal happiness (paragraph 33). Job illustrates how trouble is very close when he suffers the loss, not only of external goods, but also of goods of his own body (paragraph 34), as

is also seen in the martyrs (paragraph 35). Augustine continues the explanation of Psalm 22 with reference to the sufferings of Christ and of his body, the Church (paragraphs 36 through 42). Augustine interprets the words of the psalm, *I shall sing of you in the midst of the church* (Ps 22:23), pointing to the grace of the New Testament in which we sing a new song to the Lord and in which God is worshiped only with love (paragraphs 43 to 45). In the New Testament a sacrifice of praise is offered to God by the offspring of Abraham and Jacob, the children of the promise (paragraphs 46 to 48). Augustine explains that the offspring of Jacob and of Israel are the same and that through faith the Gentiles have been grafted on to the domesticated olive tree like branches taken from the wild olive tree (paragraphs 49 through 51).

As heirs of the New Testament we should serve God not as slaves in the fear of punishment but as children in the love of righteousness (paragraph 52). Love drives out a servile fear of punishment, but one can still have a chaste fear of offending God (paragraph 53). Those who are not subject to the righteousness of God will go into the outermost darkness, about which Honoratus had asked (paragraph 54). Having turned from the warmth and light of love, the devil and his angels have gone into the cold of the outermost darkness (paragraph 55).

Rational creatures, whether angels or human souls, were made so that they could attain happiness only by participating in the highest good, which is their creator. If they turn away from him, they grow dark (paragraph 56). Hence, non-believers are darkness as we all once were, but the devil and his angels have been sent into the outermost darkness (paragraph 57). In another sense a soul that turns away from God in sin suffers in outer darkness in the mind, but outermost darkness in the pains of the body (paragraph 58).

In the words, *He has neither spurned nor despised the prayer of the poor man* (Ps 22:25), Augustine interprets the poor man both as a humble man and also as Christ, who, though rich, became poor (paragraph 59). The poor confess their praise in the Church and pay their vows to God, that is, offer the sacrament of Christ's body (paragraphs 60 and 61). The faithful do not seek their own interests, but live with the love of Christ, the love whose four dimensions Honoratus had asked about (paragraph 62). Augustine explains these four dimensions as referring to the breadth of good works, the longanimity of patience, the height of its reward, and the depth of the mystery of grace (paragraph 63) and links these with the dimensions of the cross (paragraph 64).

Verses 27 through 29 of the psalm are interpreted in terms of the apostle's preaching the grace of God and the conversion of the ends of the earth (paragraphs 65 to 67). In verse 31 Augustine finds an exhortation for us to live for Christ (paragraph 68). Finally, Augustine points out that the last verses of the psalm use the future tense to indicate that the psalm is foretelling the future (paragraphs 69 and 70). The psalm speaks of the generation to come of the pious and holy people who are the righteousness of God, for they are not righteous by their own righteousness, but by God's (paragraphs 71 and 72). This righteousness by which the faithful are righteous, while living from faith, until they are brought by perfect righteousness to vision, is the grace of the New Testament (paragraph 73).

Augustine turns to the gospel parable of the wise and foolish virgins. All of them fell asleep, that is, died, while waiting for the bridegroom (paragraphs 74 through 76). The two pairs of five were said to be virgins on account of the continence of the five senses by which they refrained from illicit pleasures; their lamps are their good works. The foolish ones, however, lacked oil, that is, charity, and attributed their good works to themselves (paragraph 77). The clamor at the arrival of the bridegroom is the angel's trumpet at the resurrection (paragraph 78). The oil is a good conscience that the foolish virgins lack and the wise cannot lend them (paragraph 79). Furthermore, it is too late to buy any; hence, Christ tells them that he does not know them, that is, they did not know him and trusted in themselves (paragraphs 80 and 81).

Augustine briefly sums up his answers to Honoratus' five questions and to the sixth question he had added (paragraph 82). He explains that he wanted to write about the grace of the New Testament because that grace has enemies who attribute to themselves the fact that they are good, though he does not mention Pelagius or Caelestius by name (paragraph 83). These enemies of the grace of the New Testament are like the foolish virgins who were left outside, not because they were not virgins but because they did not carry with them the oil of gratitude for the grace they received (paragraph 84). Those who think that they make themselves good do not love God enough. All the grace of the New Testament aims at making us grateful for the grace of God, from whom comes every good gift. In closing Augustine urges Honoratus to read the scriptures (paragraph 85).

### **A Book on the Grace of the New Testament for Honoratus**

1. You proposed five questions for me to comment on and resolve, my most dear brother, Honoratus. You picked up these questions from here and there, as they happened either to disturb you while reading or to enter your mind when you were thinking, and you poured them out in a sense before my eyes. If I want in my discussion of them to put their solution in order, not to discuss them in snatches as they were proposed, but connected and tied together in one continuous discourse, the task seems difficult. And yet, I think that they are more easily resolved if I do this. They, of course, will help one another if one question depends upon another until they all come into the order of the argument, not individually in their separate places, as if each one were occupied only with its own isolated aim, but with one point in view and working toward a single goal with a common plan and undivided truth.

1, 2. You wanted, therefore, and you reminded me in writing, that I should explain and disclose to you what that statement of the Lord meant, *My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?* (Ps 22:2, Mt 27:46, Mk 15:34), and what the apostle's words mean, *In order that, rooted and grounded in love, you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height*

*and depth* (Eph 3:18), and who are the foolish and the wise virgins,<sup>5</sup> and what is the outermost darkness,<sup>6</sup> and how one should understand, *The Word was made flesh* (Jn 1:14). These are certainly five questions mentioned by me as briefly as they were proposed by you. Next, if you will, let us also add a sixth, and let us investigate it most of all: What is the grace of the New Testament? Let all those questions look toward this one, and let each question, as it finds the opportunity, offer us its contribution to the solution of this one, not, of course, in the order in which you proposed them and I mentioned them, but in the order in which each may be summoned as it were when needed, and may reply and fulfill its proper task. Let a beginning, therefore, be made in this way.

2, 3. There is a certain life of a human being wrapped up in the senses of the flesh, given over to carnal enjoyment, shunning carnal injury and pursuing carnal pleasure. The happiness of this life is temporal. It is a matter of necessity to begin with this life, but a matter of will to continue in it. An infant is, of course, poured into this life from the womb of his mother; it flees as much as it can the injuries of this life; it desires its pleasures; it can do no more. But after a child has come to the age at which the use of reason awakens in it, the youngster can, when the will is helped by God, choose another life whose enjoyment lies in the mind, whose happiness is internal and eternal. There is, of course, present in a human being a rational soul, but it makes a difference to what one chooses to turn the use of the same reason by the will, whether to goods of an exterior and inferior nature or to goods of an interior and superior nature, that is, whether one enjoys the body and time or one enjoys divinity and eternity. The soul is situated, of course, in a certain mid-rank, having beneath it the bodily creature but having above it the creator of itself and of its body.

4. The rational soul, therefore, can make good use of temporal and bodily happiness if it does not devote itself to the creature while neglecting the creator, but makes that happiness rather serve the creator who has also given it out of the most abundant generosity of his goodness. For, as all the things that God created are good, from the rational creature itself to the lowest body, so the rational soul acts well in these if it preserves order and, by distinguishing, choosing, and weighing them, subordinates lesser goods to greater ones, bodily ones to spiritual ones, inferior ones to superior ones, temporal ones to everlasting ones. Otherwise, by neglect of the higher and by desire for the lower (for by this it itself becomes worse), it would cause itself and its body to turn toward what is worse rather than with ordered love to turn itself and its body toward what is better. For, since all substances are naturally good, praiseworthy order is honored in them, and blameworthy disorder is condemned. Nor does the soul that makes disordered use of creatures manage to escape the ordering of the creator, because, if the soul makes

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5. See Mt 25:2.

6. See Mt 8:12, 22:13.

bad use of those goods, God makes good use of even the evil, and in this way the soul becomes evil by making disordered use of goods, but God remains good in making orderly use of even the evil. For one who unjustly put himself out of order by sins is justly put in order by punishments.

5. God, therefore, wanting to show that even earthly and temporal happiness is his gift and ought to be hoped for only from him, judged that in the earlier times of the world he should establish the Old Testament, which pertains to the old human being from whom this life necessarily begins. But we are taught that those forms of happiness found in the patriarchs were granted by the gift of God, though they pertain to this passing life. Those earthly gifts, of course, were clearly promised and given, but all of them figuratively announced in advance in a hidden manner the New Testament, which was grasped by the intelligence of a few whom the same grace had made worthy of the prophetic gift. Those holy men, therefore, dispensed the Old Testament in accord with what was suitable for the time, but they belonged to the New Testament. For, even when they were enjoying temporal happiness, they understood that eternal happiness is true and preferable, and they were ministers of the temporal happiness as a mystery in order that they might attain eternal happiness as a reward. And if they at times suffered adversity, they suffered it in order that, once they were set free by the most evident help of God, they might glorify God, the giver of all goods, not only of the everlasting goods that they piously hoped for but also of temporal goods that they managed prophetically.

3. 6. *But when the fullness of time came* in order that the grace that was hidden in the Old Testament might now be revealed in the New, *God sent his Son born of a woman* (Gal 4:4). In the peculiarity of the Hebrew language that term refers to every female, whether one untouched by a man or one who has already had intercourse. But in order that you may know what Son he sent and wanted to be born of a woman, how great a God he is who has deigned to assume this lowly condition for the salvation of those who believe, pay attention now to the Gospel, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him was made nothing that has been made. In him was life, and the life was the light of human beings, and the light shone in the darkness, and the darkness did not grasp it* (Jn 1:1-5). This God, the Word of God by whom all things were made, is the Son of God, who remains immutable, present everywhere, enclosed by no place, not spread out through all things in parts, as if he had a smaller part in a smaller place and a larger part in a larger place, but whole everywhere and in that way not absent even from the minds of the wicked, though they do not see him, just as this light is not seen when it is present to the eyes of the blind. It, therefore, shines even in such darkness as the apostle referred to when he said, *For you were once darkness, but are now light in the Lord* (Eph 5:8), but such great darkness did not grasp it.

7. He, therefore, assumed a man whom human beings could see in order that, having been healed by faith, they might afterward see what they were not then able to see. But for fear that, because he appeared visibly, people would not believe that Christ the man was also God and would pay him only as much homage as they would to a man of the greatest grace and wisdom, *there was for this reason a man sent by God, whose name was John. He came to bear witness concerning the light in order that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came in order to bear witness concerning the light* (Jn 1:6-8). So great a man was he who bore witness to him who was not only man, but also God, that it was said of him, *No one has arisen among the sons of women greater than John the Baptist* (Mt 11:1). For in that way the one to whom John, who was greater than the rest, bore witness would be understood to be greater inasmuch as he was not only man, but also God. John, therefore, was a light, but such a light as that to which the Lord himself bears witness when he says, *He was a light burning and bright* (Jn 5:35), and he also said to his disciples, *You are the light of the world*. And to show what sort of light they were, he went on and said, *No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but on a lampstand in order that it may shine for all in the house. In that way let your light shine before human beings* (Mt 5:14-16). He gave these comparisons in order that we might understand insofar as we can or, if we cannot understand this as yet, that we might believe without any doubt that the human soul is not the nature of God—God's nature is, of course, immutable—but that the soul can, nonetheless, be illumined by participation. Lamps need to be lighted and can be put out. For this reason what was said of John, *He was not the light*, refers to that light that is not illumined by participation, though by participation in it those lights are illumined that are illumined by him.

8. Next there follows, *He was the true light*, and as if he were asked how the true light is distinguished from the light that is illumined, that is, how Christ is distinguished from John, he says, *He was the true light that illumines every human being coming into this world* (Jn 1:9). If it illumines every human being, then it illumines John too. And in order to show further his divinity by a far more excellent difference, he said, *He was in this world, and the world was made by him, and the world did not know him* (Jn 1:10). It is not the world that was made by him that did not know him, for only the rational creature has the power to know him, though even this visible world was made by him, that is, heaven and earth. But when he rebuked the world that did not know him, he referred to unbelievers who are situated in the world.

9. Then he added, *He came to his own, and his own did not receive him* (Jn 1:10), either because even the unbelievers, insofar as they are human beings, are his because they were created by him, or he wanted us to understand the Jews as his own in the proper sense, since he assumed the nature of the flesh from them,

and yet not all did not receive him. For he goes on and says, *But to as many as received him, he gave the power to become children of God, to those who believed in his name, those who are born not from blood, nor from the will of the flesh, nor from the will of man, but from God* (Jn 1:11-13). This is the grace of the New Testament, which was hidden in the Old, and yet it did not cease to be foretold and announced beforehand by symbols that foreshadowed it so that the soul might understand its God and be reborn for him by his grace. This birth is, of course, spiritual; for this reason it is *not from blood, nor from the will of man, nor from the will of the flesh, but from God*.

4. 10. This is also called adoption. For we were something before we were children of God, and we received the benefit of becoming what we were not, just as one who is adopted, before being adopted, was not the child of the one by whom he was adopted, but already existed in order to be adopted. And from this birth by grace that Son is distinguished who, though he was the Son of God, came in order to become the Son of Man and to give to us, who were already human children, the gift of becoming children of God. He, of course, became what he was not, but he was, nonetheless something else, and this something else was the Word of God by whom all things were made and *the true light that illumines every human being* (Jn 1:9) and God with God. We too became through his grace what we were not, that is, children of God, but we were nonetheless something, and this something was much less, that is, we were human children. He, therefore, descended in order that we might ascend, and, while remaining in his nature, he became a partaker of our nature in order that we, while remaining in our nature, might become partakers of his nature, but not in the same way. For his participation in our nature did not make him worse, but our participation in his nature makes us better.

11. *God, therefore, sent his Son born of a woman, born under the law* (Gal 4:4). For he received the sacraments of the law *in order that he might redeem those who were under the law* (Gal 4:5), that is, those whom the law held guilty because the letter kills,<sup>7</sup> because the commandment is not fulfilled before the Spirit gives life. *For the love of God, which fulfills the commandment, is poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us* (Rom 5:5). Then, after he had said, *In order that he might redeem those who were under the law*, he immediately added, *In order that we might receive the adoption of children* (Gal 4:5), that is, in order that he might distinguish the grace of this benefit from that nature of the Son who was sent, not having become a son by adoption, but always born as the Son, in order that, by having partaken in the nature of the sons of men, he might adopt sons of men to partake also of his nature. Hence, he said, *He gave them the power to become children of God* (Jn 1:12), and immediately added the manner of this birth so that we would not understand a birth in the

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7. See 2 Cor 3:6.

flesh. That is, he gave it to those *who believe in his name* and are reborn by spiritual grace, *not from blood, nor from the will of man, nor from the will of the flesh, but from God* (Jn 1:13). After that, he immediately emphasized the mystery of this change. For, as if in astonishment we would not have dared to hope for so great a good, he immediately added, *And the Word became flesh and dwelled among us* (Jn 1:14)—and this is one of those five questions that you wanted me to explain to you. It is as if he had said, “O you human beings, do not give up hope that you can become children of God, because even the very Son of God, that is, the Word of God, *became flesh and dwelled among us* (Jn 1:14). Repay him; become spirits and dwell in him who became flesh and dwelled in us. For you must not give up hope that, by participation in the Word, human beings can become children of God, since by participation in the flesh the Son of God became the Son of Man.”

12. We, therefore, who are changeable and are to be changed for the better, become partakers of the Word, but the Word, who is immutable and is not changed in any respect for the worse, became a partaker of flesh by the mediation of a rational soul. For it is not true that Christ the man either did not have a soul or did not have a rational soul, as the Apollinarists thought;<sup>8</sup> rather, in its manner of speaking scripture used “flesh” in place of “man” in order to emphasize the humility of Christ so that he would not be thought to have shunned the term “flesh” as something unworthy. For, just because scripture says, *All flesh will see the salvation of God* (Is 40:5 LXX and Lk 3:6), it does not follow that we should not understand souls in that verse. Scripture said, *The Word became flesh*, with the same meaning as if it had said, “The Son of God became the Son of Man.” *Since he was in the form of God*, as the apostle says, *he did not think it robbery to be equal to God* (Phil 2:6). It was, after all, not a case of taking what belonged to another so that it should be called robbery; rather, it belonged to his nature to be equal to God. *He emptied himself*, nonetheless, not losing the form of God, but *taking on the form of the servant* (Phil 2:7). *He humbled himself, having become obedient unto death, up to the death of the cross* (Phil 2:8). See how the apostle teaches that the same one is man and God so that he is one person; otherwise, we would have a foursome instead of a trinity. For, just as the number of persons is not increased when the flesh is added to a soul so that there is one man, neither is the number of persons increased when a man is added to the Word so that there is one Christ. We, therefore, read, *The Word became flesh*, in order that we may understand the singleness of this person, not in order that we may suspect that the divinity was changed into flesh.

5. 13. In order that he might reveal the grace of the New Testament, which does not pertain to temporal but to eternal life, Christ the man certainly did not,

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8. The Apollinarists were so called after Apollinaris, the bishop of Laodicea (c. 350); see *Heresies* 55.



therefore, have to be recommended to us by earthly happiness. Hence, there is his subjection, suffering, the scourges, the spittle, the insults, the cross, and, as if he had been defeated and overcome, death itself, in order that those who believe in him might learn the sort of reward for piety they ought to seek and hope for from him whose children they had become. Otherwise, people might regard the service of God as something of great value as a means for those who served him to seek to attain earthly happiness, while casting aside and scorning their faith, because they judge it worthy of only so lowly a reward. Hence, by his most beneficent providence God granted earthly happiness even to the impious in order that good people would not seek it as something of great value. For this reason the Seventy-Second Psalm introduces a person who is repenting for having once served God for this reward with a heart that was not right and, when he saw that the impious were prosperous and outstanding in terms of this reward, he was disturbed and began to think that God did not care about human affairs. And when the authority of the holy men and women who belong to God called him back from this thought, he received and wanted to acknowledge so great a secret, which was not disclosed to him in the midst of his labors until he entered the sanctuary of God and understood about their ultimate end. That is, he did not understand until he received the Holy Spirit, learned to desire better things, and saw the punishment that lies ahead for the impious, even for those who had flourished for a time with a happiness like the grass of the field.<sup>9</sup> Read this Seventy-Second Psalm as it was explained by our ministry on the night of the vigil of the solemnity of Saint Cyprian.<sup>10</sup>

14. Hence, Christ the man and the same Christ God, by whose most merciful humanity and in whose form of a servant we ought to learn what we should scorn in this life and what we should hope for in the next, took up in his Passion, in which his enemies thought that they were great and victorious, the cry of our weakness by which *our old man was crucified at the same time in order that the body of sin might be done away with* (Rom 6:6), and he said, *God, my God, why have you abandoned me?* (Ps 22:2). And this is one of the questions you proposed. In that way Psalm Twenty-Two begins, which was sung so long before in prophecy concerning his Passion and the revelation of the grace that he brought to make believers and to set them free.

6. 15. Hence, by citing and explaining it, I shall run through the same psalm. The Lord shouted out its first verse when he was hanging on the cross, showing that the prophecy pertained to him, in order that you may understand how the grace of the New Testament did not go unmentioned at the time when it was veiled in the Old. For the psalmist says in the person of Christ what pertains to the form of the servant, in which he bore our weakness. After all, Isaiah also says

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9. See 1 Pt 1:24.

10. See *Homily on Psalm Seventy-Two (Enarratio in psalmum lxxii)*: PL 36, 913-929.

of him, *He bears our weaknesses and is in pain on our behalf* (Is 53:4). In the cry, then, of this weakness—about this weakness Paul was not heard with regard to what he was asking and was, therefore, in a certain sense abandoned, and yet he hears from the Lord, *My grace is sufficient for you, for virtue is made perfect in weakness* (2 Cor 12:9)—in the cry, then, of this weakness of ours, which our head applied to himself, the psalmist says in this psalm, *God, my God, look at me; why have you abandoned me?* (Ps 22:2). He is, of course, abandoned in prayer insofar as he is not heard. Jesus applied this cry to himself, that is, the cry of his body, that is, of his Church, which was to be formed anew from the old man into the new man, that is, the cry of our weakness, to which the blessings of the Old Testament were going to be denied in order that it would learn to desire and to hope for the blessings of the New Testament.

16. But among those blessings of the Old Testament which pertain to the old man, we especially desire the extension of this temporal life in order that we may hold onto it somewhat longer, because we cannot hold onto it forever. Hence, all of us know that the day of death will certainly come, and almost all of us, nonetheless, try to put it off, even those who believe that they will live happily after death. So great a power does the sweet companionship of the flesh and soul have! *For no one ever hates his own flesh* (Eph 5:29), and for this reason the soul also does not want to leave its weakness even for a time, though it trusts that it will receive its flesh for eternity without weakness. Hence, in serving with the mind the law of God,<sup>11</sup> while dragging along with the flesh the desires for sin, which the apostle forbids us to obey, the pious person desires with the reason of the mind *to be dissolved and to be with Christ* (Phil 1:23), but by the senses of the flesh he rejects and flees this and, if possible, does not want *to be stripped, but to be clothed over in order that this mortal body might be swallowed up in life* (2 Cor 5:4), that is, that even the body itself might be transferred from weakness to immortality without death intervening.

17. But these words by which we desire these human days and the length of this life are words of sins and are far from that salvation that we possess not as yet in reality but already in hope. Of this hope scripture says that *we have been saved in hope, but hope that is seen is not hope* (Rom 8:24). And so, after he said in this psalm, *God, my God, look at me; why have you abandoned me?*, he immediately adds, *Far from my salvation are the words of my sins* (Ps 22:2), that is, these words are words of my sins and are far from that salvation of mine that the grace not of the Old but of the New Testament promises me. And yet, one can also divide the verse in this way, *God, my God, why have you abandoned me far from my salvation?*, as if it would say, “By leaving me, that is, by not hearing me, you have become far from my present salvation, namely, the well-being of this life.”

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11. See Rom 7:25.

Then, *words of my sins* has another meaning, namely, these words that I spoke are words of sins because they are the words of carnal desires.

18. Christ speaks these words in the person of his body, which is the Church; he speaks these words in the person of the weakness of sinful flesh, which he applied to that flesh which he assumed from the Virgin, *the likeness of sinful flesh* (Rom 8:3); the bridegroom speaks these words in the person of his bride because he united her to himself in a certain way. And in Isaiah, where it says, *He placed a crown on me like a bridegroom, and he adorned me like a bride with jewels* (Is 61:10 LXX), “*he placed on me*” and “*he adorned me*” seem like the voice of only one, and yet we understand the bridegroom and the bride to be Christ and the Church. But *they will be two in one flesh, a great mystery*, the apostle says, *in Christ and in the Church* (Eph 5:31-32); *therefore, they are no longer two, but one flesh* (Mt 19:6). If, then, there is one flesh, there is certainly also fittingly one voice. Why, then, do you, O human weakness, seek here the voice of the Word by whom all things were made? Hear rather the voice of the flesh that was made along with all things, because *the Word became flesh and dwelled among us* (Jn 1:3); hear rather the voice of the medicine by which you are healed in order that you may see God. He postponed for you the seeing of God, but brought you the man for you to see. He offered him to be killed; he gave him to be imitated; he presented him to be believed in order that by that faith the eye of the mind might be healed in order to see God. Why, then, do we disdain to hear the voice of the body from the lips of the head? The Church suffered in him when he suffered for the Church, as he also suffered in the Church when the Church suffered for him. For, just as we hear the voice of the Church suffering in Christ, *God, my God, why have you abandoned me?* (Ps 22:2), so we have heard the voice of Christ suffering in the Church, *Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?* (Acts 9:4).

7. 19. When, therefore, we are not heard for the retention or acquisition of temporal goods when we plead with God for them, he abandons us insofar as he does not hear us, but he does not abandon us with regard to the better goods that he wills that we understand, prefer, and desire. For this reason the psalm goes on and says, *I have cried to you through the day, and you will not hear, and at night—here too one understands, you will not hear—but see what he adds, and not that I may lack wisdom* (Ps 22:3). This, then, is what he says, “You will certainly not hear me as I cry out through the day, that is, in times of prosperity, so that I do not lose them, and at night, that is, in times of adversity, so that prosperity I lost might return. But you will not do this in order that I may lack wisdom, but rather in order that I may know what I ought to hope for, what I ought to desire, what I ought to ask for from you through the grace of the New Testament.” I, of course, cry out that temporal blessings may not be taken away from me, *but you, O praise of Israel, you dwell in holiness* (Ps 22:4). I do not

want you to abandon my desire by which I seek carnal happiness, but this desire belongs to the impurity of the old condition, while you seek the purity of the new. In not hearing this desire you abandon it because you seek the love in which you may dwell. *The love of God, however, is poured out in our hearts, but through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us* (Rom 5:5). For this reason you, *O praise of Israel, dwell in holiness, the praise of those who see you, because they are not praised in themselves, but in you. What, after all, do they have that they have not received*<sup>12</sup> in order that *one who boasts may boast in the Lord* (1 Cor 1:31)?

20. This is the grace of the New Testament. For in the Old Testament, when you taught that we ought to ask and hope even for this earthly and temporal happiness only from you, *Our fathers hoped in you. They hoped in you, and you rescued them. They cried out to you, and they were saved. They hoped in you, and they were not disappointed* (Ps 22:5-6). You, of course, filled those patriarchs who were living among their enemies with riches and rescued them from their foes; you made them win glorious victories and set them free from various deaths. In place of one you substituted a ram so that he would not be sacrificed;<sup>13</sup> you restored another to health from disease and gave him twice what he had lost.<sup>14</sup> You preserved another unharmed and untouched among hungry lions;<sup>15</sup> you were praised with the grateful voice of those walking about in the midst of the flames.<sup>16</sup> The Jews were looking for something of the sort to take place in Christ by which they might test whether he was truly the Son of God. In their person it is also said in the Book of Wisdom, *Let us condemn him to a most shameful death, for he shall have respect in his words. If he is the true son of God, he will take him up and set him free from the hands of his foes. These, it said, were their thoughts, and they were mistaken. For their own malice blinded them* (Wis 2:20.18.21). Since they were, of course, paying attention to the time of the Old Testament and that merely temporal happiness of the patriarchs, by which God showed them that even such blessings were his, they did not see that it was now the time at which it would be revealed in Christ that God, who bestows temporal blessings even on the impious, bestows on the righteous eternal blessings as his proper work.

8. 21. Then, after the psalmist said, *Our fathers hoped in you. They hoped in you, and you rescued them. They cried out to you, and they were saved. They hoped in you, and they were not disappointed* (Ps 22:5-6), see what he added, *I am a worm and no man* (Ps 22:7). Of course he seems to have said this simply to teach humility in order to show that he is in the eyes of his persecutors something

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12. See 1 Cor 4:7.

13. See Gn 22:13.

14. See Job 42:10.

15. See Dn 14:30-40.

16. See Dn 3:24.

most abject and contemptible. But we should not underestimate the depth of the secret and the profundity of the mystery, especially in those words that fit so great a savior in preaching of the prophets. Earlier commentators have given a most elegant interpretation of this, namely, that Christ willed that he be announced beforehand by this expression because a worm is born from the flesh without intercourse, just as he was born from the Virgin.<sup>17</sup> But when in his book Job was saying of the heavenly creatures that even they are scarcely clean in the sight of God, he says, *How much less is a man who is rottenness and a son of man who is a worm!* (Jb 25:6). He put “rottenness” in place of “mortality,” which now carries with it, as if from conception, the necessity of dying into which man was thrust because of sinning, and he called the son of man a worm as if born rotten from rottenness, that is, mortal from mortality. And for this reason, without of course undermining or rejecting that first meaning, he admonished us to seek another meaning in these words of the psalm in order that we would examine not only the psalmist’s words, *I am a worm*, but also what he added, *and no man*, in accord with what I mentioned from the Book of Job. It is as if he said, “I, however, am a son of man and not a man—not that Christ was not a man of whom the apostle said, *One mediator between God and human beings, the man Jesus Christ* (1 Tm 2:5), for every son of man is a man—but this sense refers to one who was a man in such a way that he was not a son of man, that is, Adam. Perhaps, then, *I, however, am a worm and no man*, was said in this way, that is, “I, however, am a son of man and not a man,” as if it would say, “I, however, am Christ in whom all are brought to life, not Adam in whom all die.”<sup>18</sup>

22. And in this way learn, O human beings, to desire eternal life by the grace of the New Testament. Why do you desire, as something of great value, being set free from death by the Lord, as our forefathers were set free when God was teaching that there was no other giver of even earthly happiness apart from him? That happiness belongs to the old man, and the old condition began with Adam. *I, however, am a worm and no man*, Christ, not Adam. You were old because of the old man; be new because of the new man; from Adam you were born as men, from Christ as sons of men. For it is not without reason that in the gospel the Lord most frequently calls himself son of man rather than man,<sup>19</sup> nor is it without reason that in another psalm it says, *You will save men and animals, Lord, just as your mercy, God, has been multiplied* (Ps 36:7-8). This salvation common to men and animals is, of course, also from you. But new human beings have a certain other salvation proper to them and separate from fellowship with the animals, a salvation which belongs to the New Testament. They certainly have

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17. See Origen, *Homilies on Luke* (*In Lucam homiliae*) XIV: PG 13, 1837, and Jerome, *Short Commentary on the Psalm Twenty-One* (*Breviarium in psalmum xxi*): PL 26, 880.

18. See 1 Cor 15:22.

19. See Mt 17:9, 12:22 and other places.

this, for in the same place the psalm goes on and speaks of it, *But the sons of men will hope beneath the shelter of your wings; they will be inebriated by the richness of your house, and you will give them to drink of the torrent of your pleasure, because with you is the fountain of life; in your light we shall see the light* (Ps 36:8-10). Since above he had said, *men*, he surely said here afterwards, *sons of men*, in order to distinguish the sons of men from men. Indeed, in the happiness of that salvation of his, which is common to men and animals, he wanted to call them by that first term to show that they belonged to that first man with whom the old condition and death began, who was a man in such a way that he was not also a son of man. But to these descendants who hope for another happiness and the ineffable pleasure of the fountain of life and the light of everlasting light he gave this name by which their Lord, in whom such grace is revealed, wanted to be called in a more familiar way, and he called them sons of men rather than men.

23. Do not, however, think that it is fixed as a rule of speech to be preserved like a perpetual law that, wherever you read, "men" or "sons of men," you should understand it according to this distinction. Rather, you should understand it according to the context of the reading from which the meaning is drawn if it is obvious and is dug out if it is hidden. For example, who is not impressed by the intent of the distinction in this passage of this psalm? After he had said, *Our fathers have hoped in you, and you rescued them. They cried out to you, and they were saved. They hoped in you, and they were not disappointed*, he added, *I, however*. For he did not say, "And I," but, *I, however*. What, then, does he mean who distinguishes himself in this way? He says, *I, however, am a worm and not a man* (Ps 22:5-7), as if to say: "To those whom you heard and rescued you emphasized the happiness that, as pertaining to the Old Testament, was to be given to the old man who began with Adam; *I, however, am a worm*, that is, a son of man, not a man like that man who was not a son of man.

9. 24. "And for this reason I am also what follows: *The reproach of men and the outcast of the people. All who saw me mocked me; they spoke with their lips and wagged their head. He hoped in God; let him rescue him. Let him save him, because he loved him*" (Ps 22:7-9). They said this with their lips, not in their heart, insulting him over what was not coming about, not believing what would come about. This, however, also did come about, but it came about as it ought to have come about in the Son of Man in whom the hope of eternal life was to be revealed, which belongs to the New Testament; it did not come about as they expected. And because they did not see it come about, those who belonged to the Old Testament and to the old man in whom all die, not to the Son of Man in whom all will be brought to life, insulted him as if he were defeated. Man, of course, brought death to himself and to the Son of Man, but in dying and rising, the Son of Man, *the reproach of men and the outcast of the people* even to death, brought life to man. For he willed to suffer this in the sight of his enemies in order

that they would consider him as someone abandoned. In that way he emphasized the grace of the New Testament by which we learn to seek another happiness that we now possess in faith but afterward will possess in vision. *For, as long as we are in the body*, the apostle says, *we are on a journey away from the Lord. After all, we walk by faith and not by sight* (2 Cor 5:6-7), and, therefore, now in hope, then in reality.

25. Next, he wanted to reveal, not to strangers but to his own people, his own resurrection, which did not have to be put off like ours for a long time, in order that we might learn in the example of his flesh what we ought to hope for in ours. I mean strangers not by nature but by sin, which is always contrary to nature. He died, therefore, in the sight of men, but he rose in the sight of the sons of men because death belongs to man and the resurrection to the Son of Man. For, *just as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will also be brought to life* (1 Cor 15:22). In order to encourage by the example of his flesh those who believe in him to scorn temporal for the sake of eternal happiness, he endured unto death those who persecuted him and raged at him and proudly mocked him as a man who was conquered and defeated. But because he raised up his flesh and restored it to the sight and touch of his disciples and ascended into heaven while they watched, he built them up and showed them by the most evident truth what they ought to hope for and what they ought to preach. But he left in that opinion those from whom he endured such great evils to the point of death, men who boasted over him as if he were defeated and destroyed, in order that whoever of them wanted to be saved with eternal salvation might believe about the resurrection of that man who died what they who saw it preached with signs to support their preaching and who did not hesitate to endure similar evils for that preaching.

10, 26. For this reason, when James, one of his apostles, was exhorting the faithful who were still held in this life after the passion and resurrection of Christ, he said in distinguishing the plan of God in the Old and New Testament, *You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the end of the Lord* (Jas 5:11). For he did not want them patiently to endure temporal evils in order that they might have restored to them what we read Job received.<sup>20</sup> For he was saved from that wound and decay, and everything he had lost was restored to him twofold. There too we are taught faith in the resurrection. For the children who were restored to him not double in number, but the same in number, signified that those very ones whom he had lost would rise. In that way these children, when added to those previous children, were not found to be strangers because of a restoration in a double amount. In order, then, that we would not hope for such a reward when we suffer temporal evils, he does not say, "You have heard of the endurance and end of Job." Rather he says, *You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the end of the Lord*, as if to say, "Endure temporal

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20. See Jb 42:10.

evils like Job, but in return for this endurance do not hope for the temporal goods that were restored to him with an increase, but for eternal goods that have already been realized in the Lord." Job, then, was one among those fathers who *cried out, and they were saved*. For, when the psalmist says, *I, however*, he implies clearly enough the salvation by which he wanted us to understand that they were saved, the salvation in relation to which he himself, of course, was abandoned. It was not that the patriarchs were strangers to eternal salvation, but that what was going to be revealed in Christ was then hidden. There is, of course, a veil over the Old Testament that will be removed when anyone crosses over from there to Christ. When he was crucified, the veil of the temple was torn<sup>21</sup> to signify what the apostle said about the veil over the Old Testament, *because in Christ it is done away with* (2 Cor 3:14).

27. For even in those patriarchs, though they were most rare, there were, nonetheless, examples of suffering even to death *from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah* (Mt 23:35, Lk 11:51). The Lord Jesus says that their blood will be demanded of those who persisted in the sinfulness of their fathers, who killed those men. And the New Testament neither lacked nor lacks a multitude of good believers who are rich even in this earthly happiness and experience in it the goodness and mercy of God who gave it, while adhering, nonetheless, to what the apostle, the minister of the New Testament, commanded the rich of this world: *not to think lofty thoughts and not to place hope in the uncertainty of riches, but in the living God who offers all things to us to enjoy in abundance, to do good, to be rich in good works, to give readily, to share, to store up for themselves a good foundation for the future that they may attain true life* (1 Tm 6:17-19). Such life was revealed in Christ, not only in the spirit but also in the flesh, when he rose from the dead, not the sort of life that the Jews killed in him when God did not rescue him from their hands and was thought to have abandoned him as he cried out, *God, my God, why have you abandoned me?* (Ps 22:1). In that way he made his own the cry of his martyrs. Even if they did not want to die, as he also said to Peter, *Another will gird you and bring you where you do not want to go, signifying the death by which he would glorify God* (Jn 21:18-19), and even if in that way they seemed to be abandoned by their God for a time since he refused to give them what they wanted, they would send forth that cry of the heart and have that disposition of piety that the Lord expressed by his own lips as his Passion drew near, likewise making his own the words of the martyrs, *But not what I will, but what you will, Father* (Mt 26:39, Mk 14:36).

11. 28. After all, in whom ought the life on account of which we are Christians to have been revealed if not in our head? For this reason he did not say, "God, my God, you have abandoned me," but indicated that we should look for the reason, when he added, *Why have you abandoned me?*, that is, "Because of what?" "On

21. See Mt 27:51.



account of what?" "For what reason?" For there was certainly some reason and no small one that he rescued Noah from the flood,<sup>22</sup> Lot from the fire from heaven,<sup>23</sup> Isaac from the threatening sword,<sup>24</sup> Joseph from the slander of a woman and from the confinement of prison,<sup>25</sup> Moses from the Egyptians,<sup>26</sup> Rahab from the destruction of the city,<sup>27</sup> Susanna from the false witnesses,<sup>28</sup> Daniel from the lions,<sup>29</sup> the three men from the fire,<sup>30</sup> and other fathers who *cried out, and they were saved*, but did not deliver Christ from the hands of the Jews and abandoned him to the power of those venting their rage against him even to his destruction by death. Why was this? On account of what was this if not on account of what he says a little later in the same psalm, *Not that I may lack wisdom* (Ps 22:3), that is, my body, my Church, my least ones? For in the gospel he also says, *When you did it to one of my least ones, you did it to me* (Mt 25:40). *And not that I may lack wisdom*, then, was said in the same way as was said, *You did it to me*, and, *Why have you abandoned me?* was said in the same way in which it was said, *He who receives you receives me, and he who spurns you spurns me* (Lk 10:16). Not, therefore, that I may lack wisdom but in order that we may know that we ought to be Christians, not on account of this life in which God at times abandons us even to death at the hands of our persecutors but on account of that everlasting life, because we see that this has already come about in him by whose name we are called Christians.

29. See, it has come about. So many, nonetheless, want to be Christians only in order to enjoy the happiness of this life, and so they give out when it gives out. Indeed, if so outstanding an example were not found in our head, where would we learn to scorn temporal goods for heavenly ones, not looking to those things that are seen but those that are not seen? *For those things that are seen are temporal, but those that are not seen are eternal* (2 Cor 4:18) By those words he graciously chose to symbolize in himself those Christians. For, as far as he himself is concerned, how would he who had come precisely for that hour have wanted to be delivered from that hour?<sup>31</sup> Or how did he speak in that way, as if something were happening to him that he did not want, since he had the power of laying down his life and of taking it up again?<sup>32</sup> Nor would anyone take it from him, but he would lay it down and take it up, as he says in the gospel. But we were

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22. See Gn 6:5–7:23.

23. See Gn 19:12–25.

24. See Gn 22:1–13.

25. See Gn 39:7–18, 41:14.

26. See Ex 3–14.

27. See Jos 6:16–25.

28. See Dn 13:1–61.

29. See Dn 14:27–39.

30. See Dn 3:8–94.

31. See Jn 12:27.

32. See Jn 10:18.

undoubtedly speaking in those cries, and the head was speaking in the name of his body, without dividing up the meaning of the words where there is no division in the bond of unity.

12, 30. Next, notice what follows in the psalm and what he says in prayer. He says, *For you took me out of the womb, my hope, from the breasts of my mother. From the womb I was cast onto you; from the womb of my mother you are my God* (Ps 22:10-11), as if he were saying: "You have drawn me out of one thing and away from another onto still another in order that you might be for me the good instead of the earthly goods of this mortality that I have obtained in the womb of my mother at whose breasts I have sucked. For this is the old condition from which you have taken me, and those are goods that belong to birth in the flesh, and away from them you are my hope. From them, after all, I turned to you. And *from the womb*, that is, I who began from these things in the womb, *was cast upon you*, that is, crossing over to you, committing my whole self to you. And for this reason, *from the womb of my mother*, that is, from the goods of the flesh that I took on in the womb of my mother, *you are my God*, in order that from these you may be my good." This was said in that way of speaking as if it said, for example: "From earth I have come to dwell in heaven," that is, I have migrated from here to there. And this is the transformation into him of us who by the grace of the New Testament change our life, passing from the old to the new. For, in order to signify this reality by the sacrament of his passion and resurrection, he changed his flesh from mortality to immortality, but he did not change his life from the old condition to the new, since he never existed in impiety from which he might cross over to piety.

31. And yet there have been some who thought that the words, *From the womb of my mother you are my God*, belong to our head, because the Father is his God insofar as he is a man in the form of a servant, not insofar as he is equal to him in the form of God. They, therefore, took, *From the womb of my mother you are my God*, as if it said, "From the time I became man you are my God." But what does, *You took me out of the womb*, mean if it refers to Jesus himself who was born of a Virgin? As if God did not take other human beings out of the womb, though his providence governs all births! Or did he choose to signify by this the childbearing of the virgin with the preservation of the marvelous integrity of her virginity when he said, *You took me from the womb*, so that what came about miraculously in that case would seem incredible to no one since God is said to have done it? What, then, does it mean, *My hope from the breasts of my mother*? How can this too refer to the very head of the Church, as if its hope in God began for it from the breasts of its mother and not before in the very womb? For we should understand no other hope than that by which it was going to happen that God would raise him up from the dead; all of this is, of course, said insofar as he became man. Or, because the breasts of women are said to begin to fill with milk from conception, did he perhaps want us to understand, *from the*

*breasts*, as if he had said, "From the time I assumed flesh," the flesh for which he ought to have had the hope of immortality, since he would not have had hope for it before, when he was in the form of God, in which nothing would be changed for the better, but *from the breasts of my mother*, that is, from the very assumption of flesh, which was conceived in hope, the hope whose realization was going to be when he would pass over from death to immortality?

32. But I do not know how the words, *I was cast onto you from the womb*, can apply to our head—as if, when he was in the womb, he was not in God, *in whom we live and move and have our being* (Acts 17:28), or as if the rational soul of that infant began to hope in God from the time the flesh emerged from the womb. Or are we perhaps to believe that, when he was already born, he acquired a rational soul, which he still lacked in the womb of his mother? And because the same soul, which the flesh acquired when it was born, was clinging to God, are we to think that it was said with regard to the same flesh, *I was cast onto you from the womb*, as if it said, "I obtained from the womb that soul which was clinging to you"? But who would dare rashly to rush into that opinion since the explanation of the arrival or beginning of the soul lies hidden in so great a mystery of nature that it is better always to be in pursuit of this question as long as we are in this life than at some point to presume that we have discovered the answer? I have given how these words of ours can be understood with regard to our transformation into Christ. If, however, anyone has been able or will be able to say something better, we do not stand in the way of anyone's talent, nor do we envy anyone's learning.

13, 33. Now see how the words which follow, *Do not depart from me because trouble is very close* (Ps 22:12), cast light on the meaning of, *Why have you abandoned me?* For how did he to whom it is said, *Do not depart from me*, abandon him except in the sense that he abandoned him with regard to the temporal happiness of his old life? He, however, asks that God not depart and desert him with respect to the hope of eternal life. But what does, *because trouble is very close*, mean? He says this as if his Passion were still imminent, though he is understood to say in the very midst of his Passion these words that were prophesied about him in this psalm. For he is also going to say here those words that were written most clearly in the gospel: *They have divided my garments and cast lots over my cloak* (Ps 22:19); this happened when he was already hanging upon the cross.<sup>33</sup> What *trouble*, then, *is very close* but that in the midst of which he was? But he undoubtedly wants us to understand that, when the flesh is in suffering and punishments, the soul then, of course, has the great struggle of patience in which it must struggle and pray that it not fail. But nothing is nearer to the soul than its own flesh. For this reason when anyone great and perfect who holds this world in contempt suffers elsewhere, he suffers nothing.

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33. See Mt 27:35 and Mk 19:24.

For he can use his vigilant reason when he loses goods that are external and are undoubtedly far from the mind of a wise man, who does not cling to them out of desire, and he can be without concern about the loss he suffers because he does not suffer. But when he loses the chief goods of the body, that is, the life and health of the body, trouble is now very close to the goods of the soul, over which he is himself inwardly like the lord of the body. What would he do for any reason in order that he might not feel pain when the body is wounded or burned? For he is bound to it by so great a union that he can suffer but cannot not feel pain.

34. Hence even the devil kept to this order in harming that great man whom he had asked to test; he first took his external goods into his power. And after they were taken away and destroyed, he saw that Job was unshaken. For he had said, *The Lord gave; the Lord has taken away; as it pleased the Lord, so it has been done. Blessed be the name of the Lord* (Jb 1:21). He asked also that he might torment the flesh with an ulcer, doing battle with him in such a struggle that he attacked the closest goods, that is, the goods of the body. If, having lost these, he perhaps gave in and turned his heart to impiety, he would also have lost the goods of the soul, and in order to destroy these goods, the tempter moves in closer when he now rages against the body. Finally, in such great temptation, when trouble was very close to the goods of the soul, though he says many things by way of prophecy, that man speaks still far differently than when he lost those external goods,<sup>34</sup> among which were his children, whom he had not lost but sent on ahead.

35. Transformed into a symbol of Christ, the soul of the martyr, therefore, cries out when it begins to be troubled in the flesh and says to God who has abandoned it in terms of earthly happiness, though the soul is with him in the hope of eternal life, *Do not depart from me because trouble is very close* (Ps 22:12); it is not in my field, not in my gold, not in my cattle, not in my roof and walls, not in the loss of my family, but in my flesh to which I am joined, to which I am connected, of which I cannot fail to be aware. Hence, it presses me from very close in order that I may fail in the virtue of patience. *Do not leave me because there is no one to help* (Ps 22:12)—not a friend, not a neighbor, not human praise, nor the remembrance of past pleasure, nor any of those things by which the collapse of earthly happiness is held back, not even human virtue itself, which is in my mind, because, if you abandon it, what is human virtue? *What, after all, is a human being unless you are mindful of him* (Ps 9:5, Heb 2:6)?

14, 36. *Many calves have surrounded me*, that is, less important ones among the people. *Fat bulls have besieged me* (Ps 22:13), that is, the proud and the rich, the leaders of the people. *They have opened their mouth against me* (Ps 22:14), crying out—*Crucify him, crucify him* (Lk 23:21)—*like a lion that seizes and roars* (Ps 22:14). For they seized him when they arrested him and brought him to

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34. See Jb 3:1-26.

the governor, and they roared when they sought his death. *I was poured out like water* (Ps 22:15), as if in order that my persecutors might slip on me and fall. *All my bones have been scattered* (Ps 22:15). What are my bones but the body's sources of strength? But the body of Christ is the Church. Who are the sources of the Church's strength, then, but the apostles who are elsewhere also called pillars?<sup>35</sup> These were, of course, scattered when he was led to his Passion or when he suffered and died. *My heart has become like wax melting in the middle of my belly* (Ps 22:15). It is certainly difficult to discover how this fits our head, the savior of his body. For only out of great fear does it happen that the human heart melts like wax. How could that happen in him who had *the power of laying down his life and taking it up again* (Jn 10:18)? But he applied the case of his weak members to himself or that of those who panic at the fear of death, like Peter himself, who went from being so extraordinarily presumptuous to denying him so often,<sup>36</sup> or of those who are worn down with salutary sorrow, again like the same Peter when *he began to weep* (Mt 26:75, Lk 22:62). For sorrow too melts the heart, as it were. For this reason it said that it is also called λύπη in Greek.<sup>37</sup> Or he surely wanted us to understand a deep mystery, that is, by the name of his heart he wanted us to understand his scriptures where his plan, of course, lay hidden which was then disclosed when, through his suffering, he fulfilled those things that were prophesied of him. The scriptures, then, were melted into clarity by these events that were carried out by his coming, birth, suffering, resurrection, and glorification. For who does not understand them now in the prophets when they have been brought even to the understanding of the carnal multitude? Perhaps he referred to that multitude by *the middle of his belly*, since in his body, which is the Church, the carnal and lower multitude has a place like the belly. Or if the term "belly" belongs more to the interior parts, he showed that the understanding of the scriptures belongs rather to those who are more perfect since his heart, that is, his scriptures, which contain his plan, are melted like wax in the midst of them, that is, in their thought, that is, it is opened up, discussed, and explained by the warmth of the Spirit.

15, 37. *My strength has dried up like a potsherd* (Ps 22:16). A shard is made hard by fire. In the same way the strength of the body of Christ is not consumed by fire like straw, but like a shard is made strong by suffering as if by fire. For *the furnace tests the vessels of the potter, and the test of tribulation tests righteous men* (Sir 27:6), as another passage of scripture says: *And my tongue has clung to my throat* (Ps 22:16). *This can, of course, be thought to signify his silence that another prophet mentions when he says, Like a lamb before the shearer he was without a sound* (Is 53:7). But if we understand his tongue to be those in his body,

35. See Gal 2:19.

36. See Mt 26:69-75.

37. Augustine suggests that λύπη: "sorrow" is derived from λύω: "melt."

which is the Church, through whom he speaks the gospel, then they cling to his throat when they do not depart from his commandments.

38. But how do the following words, *And you have brought me down into the dust of death* (Ps 22:16), apply to the head, since his body, which rose on the third day, was not broken down into dust? Nor did the apostles explain what was said in another psalm, *And you will not allow your holy one to see corruption* (Ps 16:10, Acts 2:27.31), in another sense than that his flesh, which rose so soon, was not corrupted. Hence it is likewise said in another psalm, *What profit is there in my blood when I go down into corruption? Will dust confess to you or announce your truth?* (Ps 30:10). That is, he said that, if, having died in the same way as others, he were reduced to dust and his flesh were preserved only for the last resurrection, there would be no profit in his blood, because his death would have done no good and would not have announced the truth of God that foretold that he would rise immediately. What, then, does what he says in this passage mean, *And you brought me into the dust of death*, unless we understand his body the Church, in which those who have suffered or are suffering for his name do not immediately rise as he did but are reduced to the dust of death, though they will rise when that time comes of which the gospel speaks, *The hour will come when all who are in tombs will hear his voice and come forth* (Jn 5:28-29). Or he surely wanted us to understand the dust of death figuratively as the Jews into whose hands he was brought down. For scripture said, *Not so the wicked, not so! But like the dust that the wind blows from the face of the earth* (Ps 1:4).

16. 39. Next there follows, *For many dogs have surrounded me; the council of the evil have surrounded me* (Ps 22:17), as if the same ones whom he called the dust of death, into which he was brought, he also called, "many dogs" and "the council of the evil." That is, he called by this name those who generally bark against harmless people with whom they are not familiar. But now in these verses that he adds he all but recites the gospel. His crucifixion is, of course, expressed in the words, *They have pierced my hands and my feet; they have numbered all my bones. But they themselves have looked at me and gazed upon me* (Ps 22:17-18). For his hands and feet were pierced by nails, and his bones were numbered, in a sense, when he was stretched upon the wood. But they looked at him and gazed upon him to see what would happen to him and whether Elijah would come and deliver him.<sup>38</sup>

40. Now the verse that follows needs no explanation: *They divided my garments, and they cast lots for my cloak* (Ps 22:19). The words that are added next are those of someone at prayer both in the person of the head, that is, of the man who is the mediator, and in the person of the body, which is the Church, which he also calls his only one. He says, *But you, O Lord, do not make your help distant from me* (Ps 22:20). This refers to his flesh, whose resurrection has not

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38. See Mt 27:49.

been postponed for a long time like that of the rest. *Look to my defense* (Ps 22:20), so that my enemies may do no harm who think that they were able to do something by destroying my mortal flesh. But they do no harm if, under the defense of God's grace, the soul is not overcome and does not consent to them for evil. In that sense, after all, it was elsewhere prophesied, *The earth*, that is, earthly flesh, *has been handed over into the hands of the wicked* (Job 9:24).

41. *Rescue my soul from the sword* (Ps 22:21). A sword is a blade, but Christ was, of course, not slain by such a weapon but by the cross, nor was his side opened by a sword but by a lance. Metaphorically, then, he called the tongue of his persecutors a sword, just as in another psalm it is said, *And their tongue is a sharp sword* (Ps 57:5). Hence, because the tongue of the evil overpowered his flesh, he prays that it may do no harm to his soul when he says, *Rescue my soul from the sword*. In that way, if you refer it to the head of the body, this prophetic prayer may not seem like the begging of someone in need, but rather the symbolic predication of what will be. Or, surely, since his body, which is the Church, was going to suffer serious persecutions, he mentioned the sword, the weapon by which the martyrs were most often killed. He wanted their souls to be rescued from it so that they would not fear *those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul* (Mt 10:28) and consent to what is forbidden. Or in their sufferings he also calls the tongue of their enemies a sword, from which he wants his soul, that is, the soul of his body, the soul of his saints, to be rescued.

42. But regarding what follows, *And from the hand of the dog my only one* (Ps 22:21), I think nothing more suitable is understood than the one Church. He called a dog the world that barks, not with reason, but out of habit, in opposition to the unfamiliar truth. For it is the nature of dogs that they do not bark at those to whom they are accustomed, whether they are good or bad persons, but they are provoked by the sight of unfamiliar persons, even harmless ones. *By the hand of the dog*, however, he signified the power of the world. He signified by the term "lion" the kingdom of the world that would be hostile to his body, that is, to the Church, in the words he added, *Save me from the jaws of the lion* (Ps 22:22). For this reason scripture says, *There is no difference between the threats of a king and the anger of a lion* (Prv 19:12), although the apostle Peter also compared the devil to a lion that roars and goes about, seeking whom it may devour.<sup>39</sup> Showing that the proud of this world will be opposed to the humble Christians, he goes on as follows, *And my humility from the horns of unicorns* (Ps 22:22). The proud are, of course, symbolized by unicorns because pride hates companionship and every proud man desires as much as he can to stand out all alone.

17. 43. Now pay attention to where the fruit is to be found. For either he was abandoned in order that he might not be heard for earthly happiness—not that he

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39. See 1 Pt 5:8.

might lack wisdom<sup>40</sup> but in order that we might be wise about what we ought to desire by the grace of the New Testament—or he was not abandoned, but was heard insofar as he who had said, *Why have you abandoned me?* (Ps 22:2) was heard in his prayer, *Do not depart from me* (Ps 22:12). This is, of course, contrary unless the former refers to one thing and the latter to another. Pay attention and listen; drink it in to the extent that you are wise, to the extent that you grasp it, to the extent that I am able to state something so important, in fact to the extent that he who hears us has granted, both in Christ insofar as he is man, the mediator between us and God, and with Christ insofar as he is God equal to God and *able to do*, as the apostle says, *beyond what we ask for or understand* (Eph 3:20). See in this psalm the grace of the New Testament; see what the fruit of that abandonment, tribulation, and prayer does, what it teaches, what it commends, what it illustrates. See what we read was prophesied so long before and what we see has now been realized. He says, *I shall tell your name to my brothers; in the midst of the Church I shall sing of you* (Ps 22:23). Those are the brothers of whom he says in the gospel, *Go and tell my brothers* (Jn 20:17). It is the Church that he just called his only one; this is the only Catholic one which, is spread abundantly through the whole world, which, by growing, stretches out to the most distant nations. Hence he says in the gospel, *This gospel will be preached in all the world as testimony to the nations, and then the end will come* (Mt 24:14).

44. But when he says, *I shall sing*, this is that new song of which it is said in another psalm, *Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth* (Ps 96:1). You have here both of these: the song that he says that he will sing and the Church in whose midst he will sing. The song refers to the new song, the Church to all the earth. He, of course, sings in us for we sing by his grace, as the apostle says, *Or do you wish to receive an experience of him who speaks in me, namely, Christ?* (2 Cor 13:3). But *the midst of the Church* may refer either to its lofty position and its revelation, because everything is said to be set in the middle to the extent that it is known more clearly, or it surely may refer to those interior to the Church because the interior parts are the middle ones. For not everyone who makes sounds with his lips sings the new song, but the one who sings in the way the apostle advises when he says, *Singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts* (Eph 5:19). For this joy is within, where the sound of praise is both sung and heard; by this sound he is praised who is to be loved gratuitously with the whole heart, the whole soul, the whole mind<sup>41</sup> and who sets his lover ablaze for himself by the grace of his holy Spirit. For what else is the new song but the praise of God?

18, 45. Then he goes on and demonstrates this point more clearly. For, after he had said, *I shall tell your name to my brothers*, because *no one has ever seen*

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40. See Ps 22:3.

41. See Mt 2:37, Lk 10:27, Dt 6:5.



God, but *the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he has revealed him* (Jn 1:18), and added, *In the midst of the church I shall sing of you*, he immediately showed how he sang, that is, that he sang in us when we make progress in the name that he told to his brothers. For he said, *O you who fear the Lord, praise him* (Ps 22:24). But who truthfully praises if not one who sincerely loves? It is, then, the same as if he had said, "O you who fear the Lord, love him." For he said to Job, as scripture says, *See, piety is wisdom* (Job 28:28). But piety is the worship of God, and we worship him only by loving him. The supreme and true wisdom, then, is found in that first commandment, *You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart and with your whole soul* (Mt 22:37, Lk 10:27, and Dt 6:5), and in this way wisdom is the love of God and is only poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom 5:5). But the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord (Ps 111:10), and there is no fear in love; rather, perfect love casts out fear (1 Jn 4:18). Hence, when fear has been sent ahead into our heart, it drives out from there the habit of bad actions and reserves a place for love, and when love comes as the heart's master, fear leaves in order that love may dwell there.

46. Therefore, *O you who fear the Lord, praise him* (Ps 22:24). In order that you may worship him not slavishly but freely, learn to love him whom you fear, and you will be able to praise what you love. For men of the Old Testament feared God on account of the letter that terrorizes and kills those who do not yet have the Spirit who gives life; they ran with sacrifices to the temple, and they offered bloody sacrifices. Though they were a sign of the blood to come by which we were redeemed, yet they did not know what they foreshadowed. But now in the grace of the New Testament, *O you who fear the Lord, praise him*. He, of course, announced beforehand that those sacrifices would be changed that were then offered to foreshadow what was to come. He said, *I shall not accept calves from your hand nor goats from your flocks* (Ps 50:9), and a little later, in order to reveal the sacrifice of the New Testament when those sacrifices would cease, he says, *Offer to God a sacrifice of praise, and pay your vows to the Most High* (Ps 50:14). And at the end of the same psalm, he says, *A sacrifice of praise will glorify me, and there is the way in which I shall reveal to him my salvation* (Ps 50:23). God's salvation is Christ. Old Simeon recognized him as an infant and took him into his hands, saying, *Now, Lord, do you dismiss your servant in peace in accord with your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation* (Lk 2:29-30).

19. 47. *O you, then, who fear the Lord, praise him; all the offspring of Jacob, proclaim his greatness* (Ps 22:24). He does not stop because it was not enough for him to say, *the offspring of Jacob*, unless he added, *all*. Otherwise, it might be taken to refer only to those who would come to believe from among the people of Israel. For the offspring of Jacob is the same as the offspring of Abraham. But the

apostle says to all who believe in Christ, not merely to those who were believers from Israel, *You are, therefore, the offspring of Abraham, heirs according to the promise* (Gal 3:29). For there he recalled the foreshadowing of the New Testament in the words of scripture, *From Isaac your offspring will have its name* (Gn 21:12, Rom 9:7), not, of course, from Ishmael, the son of the slave girl. When writing to the Galatians, he says that the two testaments were prefigured allegorically in those two sons of Abraham, the slave and the freeman, and in those two women, the slave girl and the free woman. Hence, he says, *It is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise will be counted as offspring. For this is a statement of a promise: At this time I shall come, and Sarah will have a son* (Rom 9:8-10, Gn 18:10).

48. It would be much work and take too long to lay out carefully why the children of the promise, who belong to Isaac,<sup>42</sup> are counted as belonging to the grace of the New Testament. I shall, however, briefly touch on this point, on which you will ponder more fruitfully to the extent that you have pondered more piously. God does not promise everything that he predicts. For he also predicts those things that he himself does not do, because he foreknows all that will be. He therefore predicts even the sins of human beings, which he could foreknow but not cause. But he promises what he himself is going to do, nor are these things evil but rather good. For who promises evils? Though, therefore, he inflicts evils upon the evil, not sins but their punishments, he nonetheless threatens those rather than promises them. He gives and foreknows all things, but he predicts sins, threatens punishments, promises gifts. The children of the promise, then, are children of a gift. This is the grace that is given gratuitously, not because of the merits of the worker but because of the mercy of the giver. For this we give thanks to the Lord our God; this is the great sacrament in the sacrifice of the New Testament, and you will know where and when and how it is offered when you have been baptized.<sup>43</sup>

20, 49. Then he goes on and says, *Let all the offspring of Israel fear him* (Ps 22:25). It is no small mystery why Jacob and Israel were one man with two names. But we cannot say everything in one book, in which we have already gone on so long and have not yet said anything about the other three questions, that is, about the outermost darkness, and about the breadth, length, height, and depth, and about the two sets of five virgins. What he called above, *all the offspring of Jacob*, he calls in the following verse, *all the offspring of Israel*. But why did he say above, *Proclaim his greatness*, and afterward say, *Let them fear him*? The proclamation of his greatness fits with the praise of which he had said, *O you who fear the Lord, praise him*, on which I have already said much. There, of course, you see the love of God or charity, which, when perfect, *casts out fear*

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42. See Gal 4:28.

43. Before baptism the catechumens were admitted only to the liturgy of the word.

(1 Jn 4:18). Why, then, does he say again, *Let all the offspring of Israel fear him?* The apostle says, *For you have not received the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear* (Rom 8:15). But the same apostle recommends fear to the wild olive tree grafted onto the domesticated olive tree, that is, to the Gentiles added to the root of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in order that they too may become Israel, that is, belong to the offspring of Abraham.<sup>44</sup>

50. In the gospel, at the encounter with that centurion who came to believe in him from the Gentiles, the Lord himself predicted this ingrafting of the wild olive tree, after the natural branches have been broken off on account of the pride of unbelief. Then the Lord said, *Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith in Israel*, and he added, *Therefore, I say to you that many will come from the east and the west and recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom will enter into the outermost darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth there* (Mt 8:10-12). Thus he signified that the wild olive tree will be grafted on because of humility. That centurion had said to him, *I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my servant will be healed* (Mt 8:8, Lk 7:6-7). But he signified the breaking off of the natural branches on account of the pride of those who, *not knowing the righteousness of God and wanting to establish their own, were not subject to the righteousness of God* (Rom 10:3). Of these who were swollen with empty pride it was, of course, said that *they will enter into the outermost darkness*, because, while boasting that they were of the offspring of Abraham, they refused to become children of Abraham so that they might be children of the promise.<sup>45</sup> For they did not receive the faith of the New Testament where the righteousness of God is made known. *Wanting to establish their own*, that is, as if relying on their own merits and works, they refused to be children of the promise, that is, children of grace, the children of mercy, *that one who boasts might boast in the Lord* (1 Cor 1:31), believing in him *who makes the sinner righteous* (Rom 4:5), that is, who makes a believer out of a sinner. In that way his faith is counted for righteousness, and there is realized in him not the benefit that his merit demanded from God but that the Lord promised.

51. In dealing with these people who were grafted onto the domesticated olive tree by grace, the apostle said, *You say, "The branches were broken off in order that I might be grafted on." True, they were broken off on account of their unbelief, but stand firm in your faith. Do not think lofty thoughts, but have fear* (Rom 11:19-20). For it is God's gift, not your merit. He says this elsewhere too, *You were saved by grace through faith, and this is not due to you; rather, it is God's gift. It does not come from works lest anyone be filled with pride. For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has*

44. See Rom 11:17-20.

45. See Rom 10:3.

prepared in order that we might walk in them (Eph 2:8-10). There is, therefore, present in this understanding of grace the fear of which it is said, *Do not think lofty thoughts, but have fear*. But this fear is different; it is not that servile fear that *love casts out* (1 Jn 4:18). For with that fear one fears that he may fall into the torment of punishment, but with this fear one fears that he may lose the grace of the gift.

21. 52. Hence, although the apostle says to believers, who belong to the New Testament, what I cited a little before: *For you have not received the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as children in whom we cry out, "Abba, Father"* (Rom 8:15), that is, that there might be in us the faith *that works through love* (Gal 5:6), not so much by fearing punishment as by loving righteousness. For the soul does not become righteous except by participation in him who is better, who makes the sinner righteous. What, after all, does it have that it has not received?<sup>46</sup> Hence, it ought not, by attributing to itself what comes from God, boast as if it has not received. On this account it was told, *Do not think lofty thoughts, but have fear*. And those who, as living from faith,<sup>47</sup> are heirs of the New Testament and have been called into freedom<sup>48</sup> are also commanded to have this fear. For not to think lofty thoughts means not to be proud, as he showed in another passage by contrast where he said *Not thinking lofty thoughts, but agreeing with the humble* (Rom 12:16). From his words, *agreeing with the humble*, he clearly showed that he said *thinking lofty thoughts* in the sense of being proud.

53. Fear, then, is not present in love, because *perfect love casts out fear* (1 Jn 4:18), but that servile fear, that fear by which someone who holds back from wrongdoing, is frightened by punishment, not delighted by righteousness. Love that does not take delight in sinfulness, even if impunity is offered, casts out this fear, not that fear by which the soul fears to lose the grace that caused it to take delight in not sinning, fear by which it fears that God may abandon it, even if he does not punish it by any torment of pains. This fear is chaste; love does not cast it out, but summons it. Of it, of course, scripture says, *The fear of the Lord is chaste, lasting for age upon age* (Ps 19:10). It would never say that this fear lasts unless it knew of another that does not last. And it did well to call it chaste. For love does not lack the means by which the soul clings to God, for the soul says in another psalm, *You have destroyed everyone who has fornicated against you, but for me to cling to God is good* (Ps 73:27-28). For, even if a wife who has an adulterous heart does not commit adultery out of fear of her husband, what she lacks in action she nonetheless has in her will. But a chaste wife has another kind of fear. For she too fears her husband, but chastely. Also the former fears that her

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46. See 1 Cor 4:7.

47. See Rom 1:17, Gal 3:11, Heb 10:38, Hb 2:4.

48. See Gal 5:13.

husband may arrive in anger, the latter that he may leave offended. For the presence of the husband is painful to the wife who is not in love with him, but his absence is such for a wife who is in love with him. Let all the offspring of Israel, then, fear the Lord with a chaste fear that lasts for age upon age; let them fear him whom they love, not thinking lofty thoughts, but agreeing with the humble. Let them work out *their salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who produces in them the willing and the action in accord with good will* (Phil 2:12-13).

22. 54. This is the righteousness of God; this is what God gives to a human being when he makes the sinner righteous. *Not knowing this righteousness of God and wanting to establish their own righteousness*, the proud Jews were not subject to the righteousness of God (Rom 10:3). By this pride they were cast out in order that the humble wild olive tree might be grafted on. *And they will go into the outermost darkness* (Mt 8:12), about which you asked, as many come from the east and the west who will recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.<sup>49</sup> For they are now in outer darkness where we should not give up hope for their correction. But if they refuse correction, *they will go into the outermost darkness* where there is no place for correction, *for God is light, and there is no darkness in him* (1 Jn 1:5), but he is the light of the heart, not of these eyes that are in the flesh. Nor is he at all such light as one thinks of when one imagines this visible light. And yet there is in this case too a seeing, but far different, far otherwise. For who can explain in words what sort of light love is? Who will ever show this by an example of those things that lie before the senses of the body? Or is light perhaps not love? Listen to the apostle John; he, of course, said what I just mentioned: *God is light, and there is no darkness in him*, and he again says, *God is love* (1 Jn 4:8). And in this way, if *God is light* and *God is love*, light is the same as love, *which is poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us* (Rom 5:5). He likewise says, *One who hates his brother is still in the darkness* (1 Jn 2:11). This is the darkness into which the devil and his angels have entered by their great pride. *For love is not jealous and is not puffed up* (1 Cor 13:4). It is not jealous because it is not puffed up. For, where being puffed up comes first, there immediately follows jealousy, for pride is the mother of envy.

55. The devil and his angels, then, having turned away from the light and warmth of love and having entered into proud hatred, have become frozen, as it were, with icy hardness. And for this reason they are located figuratively in the north wind. Since the devil was hovering over the human race from there, the grace of the savior that was going to come is predicted in the Song of Songs: *Rise up, O north wind, and come, O south wind, and blow over my garden, and its*

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49. See Mt 8:11.

*spicy scents will flow* (Sg 4:16). Rise up, you who have attacked, who hover over those you hold subject, who oppress those you own. Rise up so that, relieved of your weight, they may stand upright whose souls you have bent down by oppressing them. *And come, south wind*, he says, calling upon the spirit of grace that blows from the south as from the warm and bright direction, that its spicy scents may flow. On this account the apostle says, *We are the good odor of Christ in every place* (2 Cor 14:15). For this reason it is also said in another psalm, *Turn back, O Lord, our captivity like a torrent in the south* (Ps 126:4), that is, the captivity by which they were held under the devil as if under the north wind where, as sinfulness abounded, they became cold and in a sense froze. For this reason the gospel also says, *Because sinfulness will abound, the love of many will grow cold* (Mt 24:12). But when the south wind blows, the ice is melted, and the torrents flow, that is, when the sins of the people are forgiven, they run to Christ out of love. For this reason it is also written elsewhere, *Like ice in fair weather, your sins will melt away* (Sir 3:17).

23, 56. Hence, the rational creature, whether in an angelic spirit or in the human soul, was made so that it cannot be for itself the good by which it becomes happy, but it becomes happy if its mutability is turned toward the immutable good. If it turns away from it, it is wretched. But its turning away is its failure, and its turning back is its virtue. Its nature, therefore, is not evil, because the creature, a spirit with rational life, even if deprived of the good by partaking of which it becomes happy, that is, even if defective, is better than the body that among bodies is the best, that is, this light that is perceived by the eyes of the flesh, because it too is a body. But any non-bodily nature is better than every body, not in mass, because only bodies have mass, but by a certain power by which it surpasses every image that the mind draws from the senses of the body and ponders. But just as in bodies themselves those which are lower, like earth and water and the air itself, become better by partaking of the better, that is, when they are illumined by light and are invigorated by warmth, so non-bodily rational creatures become better by partaking of the creator when they cling to him with a most pure and most holy love. And if they entirely lack this love, they grow dark and in a way become hard.

57. Hence, unbelieving human beings are darkness. And if they turn toward God through faith, they become light because of a certain illumination that he first sent forth. If, by making progress in this, they come from faith to vision so that they merit also to see what they believe, insofar as so great a good can be seen, they receive the perfect image of God. For to such human beings the apostle says, *You were once darkness, but now are light in the Lord* (Eph 5:8). But the devil and his angels are an outermost darkness beyond unbelieving human beings. For they turned further away from that love and advanced further into their pride and stubbornness. And because at the last judgment Christ is going to say to those whom he sets apart to his left, *Enter into the eternal fire that*

was prepared for the devil and his angels (Mt 25:41), he will say that those who are going to join these evil spirits and are going to be condemned with them will go into outermost darkness, that is, into the penal society of the devil and his angels. What is said to the good servant is just the opposite of this punishment, *Enter into the joy of your Lord* (Mt 25:23), in order that this light may be more within to the extent that this darkness is further outside. We should not picture these in different places by a vain figment of our imagination, for only bodily masses occupy areas of space. The spirit of life is not such; the rational soul is not such; far less is God, who most lovingly creates and most justly orders all things. These are said to draw near or to depart, to enter or to leave, by their wills and their loves.

58. But because they find delight in doing an evil deed, that is, a dark one, though punishment will follow to torment them, where the Lord mentions, *outermost darkness*, he also adds, *There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth* (Mt 8:12). Otherwise, sinners might madly suppose that they will have, even in the midst of that punishment, the same sort of delights as they enjoy here when they become dark with unbelief and injustice. For, because they willingly use good things unjustly, they will unwillingly be tortured justly by evil ones. Hence, *outermost darkness* can also be understood as bodily punishments. For the body is, of course, more outside in relation to the soul. Hence, the evils of the soul by which, having turned away from the light of love, it finds delight in sins are outer darkness, but the evils of the body by which it will be tormented to the end are outermost darkness, the only thing they fear who are still held bound by servile fear. For, if they were permitted with impunity to pass their life in that outer darkness of sins, they would certainly never want to come to God, to be illumined,<sup>50</sup> and to cling to him through love, where there is found *chaste fear that lasts for age upon age* (Ps 19:10). This fear does not torment the soul but makes it cling more tightly to that good that it loses if it falls.

24, 59. *Let all the offspring of Israel fear him.* And see the reason that he adds: *Because he has neither spurned nor despised the prayer of the poor man* (Ps 22:25). He calls the humble man poor. For this reason he says, *Do not think lofty thoughts, but agree with the humble* (Rom 11:20). Let all the offspring of Israel, then, fear him, because he has not despised the prayer of the man who did not have lofty thoughts, but feared. This too can be applied to the head, because the savior of the body became poor on our account, though he was rich, in order that by his poverty we might become rich.<sup>51</sup> For he became poor because of the form of a slave, because of which he also poured forth prayers. In that form, of course, *he humbled himself, having become obedient even to death* (Phil 2:8). See, therefore, what he says, *Because he has neither spurned nor despised the prayer of*

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50. See Ps 34:6.

51. See 2 Cor 8:9.

*the poor man, nor has he turned his face away from me (Ps 22:25). What does, Why have you abandoned me?, mean if he has not even turned his face away from him, except that, even in abandoning us, he does not abandon us, when concerning temporal goods he does not hear us for our foolishness (Ps 22:3). But in order that we may know what he takes away and what he offers us, he says, He has neither spurned nor despised the prayer of the poor man, nor has he turned his face away from me. And when I cried to him, he heard me (Ps 22:25). He therefore did what he was asked to do a little before when the psalmist said to him in prayer, Do not depart from me (Ps 22:12). For, if he heard, he of course did this, and he did not depart. He therefore did not abandon him in this way, though he abandoned him in some way in order that we might learn in what way we ought to want him not to abandon us.*

60. *My praise is before you (Ps 22:26). What harm, then, do they do who mock me like someone defeated because you have abandoned me in temporal matters? I shall confess to you in the great Church (Ps 34:18), not great like this synagogue that mocks the death of the one abandoned, but in the great Church spread through all the nations, the Church that believes in the resurrection of the one who was not abandoned. This is that only one that he asks to be saved from the hand of the dog (Ps 22:21), of which he also said a little later, In the midst of the Church I shall sing of you (Ps 22:23), in those, of course, who make confession, in whom he also speaks. But it is a confession not only of sins but also of the praise of God, as he himself says in the gospel, I confess to you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to little ones (Mt 11:23). For this reason he goes on and says, I shall pay my vows before those who fear him. The poor will eat and be satisfied, and those who seek him will praise the Lord (Ps 22:26-27). These are the little ones of whom he said, You have revealed them to the little ones, those who fear him and the poor, that is, the humble who do not think lofty thoughts, but fear with that chaste fear not the fear by which punishment is feared but that by which grace is preserved.*

61. By "his vows" he wanted us to understand the sacrifice of his body, which is the sacrament of the faithful. For this reason after he had said, *I shall pay my vows before those who fear him*, he immediately added, *The poor will eat and be satisfied*. For they will be satisfied by the bread which *comes down from heaven* (Jn 6:50), who, while clinging to him and preserving his peace and love, imitate his humility; for this reason, they are poor. In this poverty and satiety the apostles were especially outstanding. And *they who seek him will praise the Lord*, he says, since they understand that it is not due to their merits but to his grace that they are satisfied. They seek him, after all, because they are not from among those who *seek things that are their own, not those of Jesus Christ* (Phil 2:21). Furthermore, even if the flesh of those who praise him suffers temporal tribula-



tion or death, *their hearts will live for age upon age* (Ps 22:27). This life of the heart is not found in the senses of the body; it is hidden in the light that is within, not in the darkness that is outside, in the end of the commandment, not in the beginning of sin. *But the end of the commandment is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and faith that is not feigned* (1 Tm 1:5), *love that is not jealous and is not puffed up with pride* (1 Cor 13:4), because it does not think lofty thoughts, but fears.<sup>52</sup> And for this reason it clings with a chaste fear that lasts for age upon age. *The beginning of all sin, however, is pride* (Sir 10:15), by which the devil irrevocably entered into the outermost darkness and cast man down because he envied him and persuaded him to something like that. To that man it is said in a certain passage, *Why are earth and ashes proud because in his life he casts forth his inner parts?* (Sir 10:9-10). It says, *In his life*, in the sense of his own personal and so-called private life, in which all pride takes delight.

25, 62. Hence love, which looks out for what is common rather than for what is private, is said not to seek the things that are its own. By this love hearts live for age upon age, as if filled with the heavenly bread, of which he who satisfies them says, *Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you will not have life in you* (Jn 6:54). Rightly, then, will the hearts of those who are satisfied live for age upon age. For their life is Christ,<sup>53</sup> who dwells in their hearts,<sup>54</sup> now through faith but afterwards through vision.<sup>55</sup> For they see *now in obscurity through a mirror, but then face to face* (1 Cor 13:12). Hence love itself is now practiced in good works of charity, by which it stretches itself out to help in whatever way it can, and this is its breadth. Now it endures adversity with magnanimity and perseveres in what it has maintained with truth, and this is its length. But it does all this for the sake of obtaining the eternal life that is promised to it on high, and this is its height. But this love, on which we are in a sense founded and rooted,<sup>56</sup> comes from a hidden source. There we do not search out the reasons of God's will, by whose grace *we have been saved, not because of the works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy* (Ti 3:55). *By his will he, indeed, brought us to birth by the word of truth* (Jas 1:18). And this will of his is hidden. Gasping in awe in a sense at the depth of this mystery, the apostle cries out, *O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How inscrutable are his judgments and unsearchable his ways! Who, after all, has known the mind of the Lord?* (Rom 11:33-34). And this is the depth. *Altitudo* is, of course, a term common to what is high and what is deep. When, however, it is used in the sense of high, it emphasizes the eminence of loftiness, but when it is used in the sense

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52. See Rom 11:20, Ps 19:10.

53. See Jn 11:25, 14:6.

54. See Eph 3:17.

55. See 2 Cor 5:7.

56. See Eph 3:18.

of deep, it emphasizes the difficulty of investigation and knowledge. For this reason it is said to God: *How magnificent are your works, O Lord! Your thoughts are exceedingly deep* (Ps 92:6). And again, *Your judgments are like a great abyss* (Ps 36:7). Here, then, there belongs that passage of the apostle that you posed as a question among the rest. He says, *For this reason I bend my knees before the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom all paternity in heaven and on earth receives its name, that he may grant that in accord with the riches of his glory you may be strengthened in virtue through his Spirit, that Christ may dwell in the inner man through faith in your hearts, in order that, rooted in and founded upon love, you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length, breadth, height, and depth, that you may also know the supereminent knowledge of the love of Christ in order that you may be filled with all the fullness of God* (Eph 3:14-19).

26, 63. Pay careful attention to all this. *For this reason*, he says, *I bend my knees before the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom all paternity in heaven and on earth receives its name*. You ask: For what reason? He had stated this above, *On this account I pray that you may not lose heart over my tribulations for your sake* (Eph 3:13). He therefore desires this for them, namely, that they not lose heart over the tribulations of the apostle, which he endures for their sake, and for this reason he was bending his knees before the Father. Hence he goes on and says what is the source of their not losing heart: *That he may grant that in accord with the riches of his glory you may be strengthened in virtue through his Spirit*. These are the riches of which he says, *O the depth of the riches!* (Rom 11:33). After all, they have hidden reasons, for, since there are no preceding merits, what do we have that we have not received?<sup>57</sup> Then he goes on and adds what he desires; he says, *That Christ may dwell in the inner man through faith in your hearts*. This is the life of hearts by which we live for age upon age, from the beginning of faith up to the end, which is vision. He says, *In order that, rooted in and founded upon love, you may be able to comprehend with all the saints*. This is the communion of a divine and heavenly commonwealth; from it the poor are satisfied, not seeking the things that are their own, but those of Jesus Christ,<sup>58</sup> that is, not pursuing private advantages, but looking out for what is common, in which is found the well-being of all. For in some place the apostle says of the bread with which such people are satisfied, *We, though many, are one bread, one body* (1 Cor 10:17). To comprehend what, then? He says: *what is the breadth* in good works, as I already said, by which good will is stretched out even to the love of enemies, and *length* in order that we may with longanimity endure sufferings on behalf of this breadth, and *height* in

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57. See 1 Cor 4:7.

58. See Phil 2:21.

order that, in return for this, we may hope for an eternal reward above, not something vain and temporal, and *depth* from which the grace of God comes gratuitously according to the secret and hidden plan of his will. For there we are rooted and founded, rooted through the work of a farmer, founded through that of a builder. And because this does not come from a human being, the same apostle says in another passage, *You are God's field; you are God's building* (1 Cor 3:9). All this takes place while during our journey away from home *faith works through love* (Gal 5:6). But in the age to come perfect and complete love without any evils to endure does not by faith believe what it does not see, nor in hope long for what it does not have. But it will contemplate for eternity the immutable beauty of the truth, and without any end its peaceful occupation will be to praise what it loves and to love what it praises. Of this he goes on to say, *That you may also know the supereminent knowledge of the love of Christ in order that you may be filled with all the fullness of God* (Eph 3:19).

64. In this mystery the shape of the cross is revealed. For he who died because he willed it died as he willed. Not in vain, then, did he choose this kind of death, but in order that in it he might also be seen as the teacher of this breadth, length, height, and depth. For the breadth is in that wood that is fixed above as a crossbeam; this pertains to good works because on it the hands are stretched out. The length is found in that piece that is visible from this beam to the earth; for on it one stands, that is, persists and perseveres, which is something we attribute to long-suffering. The height is seen in that part of the wood that is left to rise upward from the crossbeam; this is at the head of the crucified because the expectation of those with good hope is on high. But that part of the wood which is not seen, which is fixed and hidden and from which the whole rises, signifies the depth of gratuitous grace, in which the minds of many are exhausted when they try to investigate it so that at the end it is said to them, *Who are you, O man, to answer back to God?* (Rom 9:20).

65. The hearts, then, of the poor who have been satisfied will live for age upon age, that is, those of the humble who burn with love, not the hearts of those who seek the things that are their own, but those of the saints rejoicing with one another. This was first accomplished in the apostles. But see in the following what peoples they gained by praising God, that is, by proclaiming the grace of God, because scripture says, *They will praise the Lord who seek him* (Ps 22:27).

27. 66. *All the ends of the earth will remember and turn back to the Lord, and all the families of nations will adore in his sight, because the Lord's is the kingdom, and he will be lord over the nations* (Ps 22:28-29). He who was mocked, he who was crucified, he who was abandoned acquires this kingdom and will in the end hand it over to his God and Father, not in order that he himself may lose it, but in order that he may bring what he sowed in faith, when he came as less than the Father to the vision in which, as his equal, he did not depart from

the Father. *All the rich of the earth have eaten and adored* (Ps 22:30). We ought to understand *the rich of the earth* to be the proud if we were right above to understand *the poor* to be the humble, of whom the gospel says, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* (Mt 5:3); *for they are the meek, those who grieve, those who hunger and thirst for justice, the merciful, the clean of heart, the peacemakers, and those who suffer persecution on account of justice*.<sup>59</sup> To each of these characteristics he links blessedness. On the contrary, then, *the rich of the earth* should be understood in this passage as the proud. For they are not without reason set apart in this way so that it was said above concerning the poor, *The poor will eat and be satisfied* (Ps 22:27), but here, *All the rich of the earth will eat and adore*. They too are, of course, brought to the table of Christ and receive his body and his blood. But they only adore; they are not also satisfied, because they do not imitate him. For, though they eat the poor Christ, they refuse to become poor, *because Christ has died for us, leaving us an example that we might follow his footsteps* (1 Pt 2:21). Still, because *he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross* (Phil 2:8), the rich scorn him and refuse to suffer similar things because of their swelling with pride, not because of their greatness, because, then, of their infirmity, not because of their health. But *because God raised him from the dead* (Rom 10:9) *and gave him a name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee might bend of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth* (Phil 2:9-10), the rich are moved by the fame of his loftiness and the glory of his name in the Church, which has spread everywhere. And they too come to his table, eat, and adore, but they are not satisfied because they do not hunger and thirst for justice. For those with such a hunger and thirst will be satisfied. Though perfect satiety will be had only in that eternal life when, after this journey away from home, we come from faith to vision, from seeing in a mirror to vision face to face, from obscurity to clear truth, yet one is not inappropriately said to be satisfied by the poverty of Christ who not only scorns all temporal goods out of temperance but also endures temporal evils with patience for the sake of his righteousness, that is, for the sake of coming to share in the eternal Word, something that he has here begun in faith.

67. Such were the fishermen and the tax-collectors, because *he chose the lowly of this world to confound the mighty* (1 Cor 1:27). Of these persons it was said, *The poor will eat and be satisfied*. But because they did not hold this satiety within themselves—for in some sense they spat it out and praised the Lord, that is, they preached while seeking him, that is, not seeking their own interests but burning with love for him—the world was roused by their preaching so that *all the ends of the earth* remembered and turned back *to the Lord and all the families*

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59. See Mt 5:4-10.

*of nations adore in his sight, because the Lord's is the kingdom, and he will be lord over the nations* (Ps 22:28-30). Because the Church was so widespread even the proud, that is, *the rich of the earth*, were drawn to eat and, though not satisfied, they adore. The prophecy of this psalm, of course, maintained in this passage the order of events that we see being realized. But it adds, *All who descend into the earth will fall before his eyes* (Ps 22:30), that is, because they love earthly goods, all do not ascend into heaven. For they do not do what the apostle said, *If you have risen with Christ, seek the things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Bear in mind the things that are above, not those that are on earth* (Col 3:1-2). Rather, the more they think that they are happy because of these earthly goods, the more they *descend into the earth*, that is, are pressed down into the things of earth. And for this reason they *will fall before his eyes*, that is, where he himself sees, not where human beings see who think that they are high and mighty.

28. 68. *And my soul*, he says, *will live for him* (Ps 22:31), for him, not for itself, like the souls of the proud who rejoice in their own private good and with empty elation leap back from the common good, which is God. Let us, of course, avoid this and seek to enjoy the common true good of all goods rather than our own private good in order *that they who live may no longer live for themselves, as the apostle says, but for him who died for them and rose* (2 Cor 5:15). For he became the mediator for the purpose of reconciling us through humility to God, from whom we had through pride withdrawn a great distance. For the verse I quoted above, *Pride is the beginning of all sin* (Sir 10:15), was not the only thing written there, but we also read, *The beginning of a man's pride is to fall away from God* (Sir 10:14). Let no one, then, live for himself but for Christ, not doing his own will, but Christ's will, and remaining in his love, just as he does the will of the Father and remains in his love. Teaching us this and exhorting us by his example, he spoke in his gospel. Though in the form of God he was equal to the Father, he nonetheless, through the form of the slave which he assumed on our account,<sup>60</sup> taught that he did not his own will but the will of the Father. How much more, then, ought we to put little value on our own personal and private will, by which we became dark, and to draw near to that common light, which *enlightens every human being coming into this world* (Jn 1:9), in order that our faces may receive light and not be embarrassed and in order that our soul may live for him! For he also goes on and adds this concerning us when he says, *And my seed will serve him* (Ps 22:31), *because the one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, but the good seed are the children of the kingdom* (Mt 13:37,38).

29. 69. Since all these things that were said in this psalm pertained not to the present but to the prophecy of what was to come, as is also seen from the events

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60. See Phil 2:6-7.

themselves, he wanted to bring it to an end so that he showed that he was not pointing out present events or recounting past ones but foretelling the future. *There will be announced to the Lord the generation to come, and the heavens will announce his righteousness to the people who will be born whom the Lord has made* (Ps 22:32). He does not say, "The Lord will be announced to the generation to come," but, *There will be announced to the Lord the generation to come*. This should not be interpreted as if something is announced to the Lord who does not know it in order that he may know it, but as the angels announce not only to us the gifts of God but also our prayers to him. For scripture says where an angel speaks to human beings, *I presented the record of your prayer* (Tb 12:12), not that God then came to know what we want or what we need—for *your Father*, says the Lord, *knows what you need before you ask him* (Mt 6:8)—but because a rational creature who obeys God must bring temporal concerns to the eternal truth, either asking that something be done for him or consulting him about what he should do. This pious disposition of mind aims at the rational creature's being built up, not at God's being instructed. For it is a kind of proof of a rational creature that it is not for itself the good by which it becomes blessed; but that good is immutable by participating in which the rational creature is also made wise.

70. Or, *There will be announced to the Lord the generation to come*, was said as if to say, "They will be pleasing who announce for the Lord, not for themselves," so that "to announce for the Lord" is like "to live for the Lord."<sup>61</sup> In that way it was said, *One who eats, eats for the Lord, and one who does not eat does not eat for the Lord*. And he added, *And he gives thanks to God* (Rom 14:6), in order to show what, "He acts for the Lord," means, namely, "he acts for his praise." For, when a good work is done for the praise of him whose grace allows that it be done, it is then done rightly, then done justly, then done piously. And for this reason someone might want to understand these words, *There will be announced to the Lord a generation to come*, while keeping their order the same, in the following sense: That generation will be announced that will come for the Lord namely, the generation of the pious and holy, for the generation of the impious and wicked is not going to come for the Lord but for themselves. Even if someone does this, he does not depart from the same meaning by which it is understood that the soul's *participation is in the Selfsame* (Ps 122:3). That is, since the rational creature is changeable, it does not become blessed unless, having in pious humility turned away from its own proper mutable good, it is subject to the immutable and common good, which is God, from whom it withdrew in proud impiety. As it makes progress in this disposition, it does whatever good it does for the Lord, that is, for the praise of him whose grace it received in order to do it. For this reason there is the thanksgiving that is celebrated in the innermost mystery of the faithful.

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61. See Rom 14:8.

30, 71. The words that follow, *And they will announce his righteousness to the people who will be born*, is a confirmation of the previous interpretation. For what was said there, *There will be announced to the Lord the generation to come*, is here expressed as, *They will announce his righteousness*. The generation, of course, that was foretold to be coming, the generation of the pious and holy, is the righteousness of God not their own. Hence they are not among those who, *not knowing the righteousness of God and wanting to establish their own righteousness, were not subject to the righteousness of God* (Rom 10:3). For that righteousness of God is commended to us in the words, *Not knowing the righteousness of God* by which we are righteous because of his grace. As a result we are this righteousness of his when we live righteously, believing in *him who makes the sinner righteous* (Rom 4:5), not that righteousness by which he himself is righteous, his own eternal and immutable righteousness. This righteousness, then, by which we are righteous by God's gift, is signified in that psalm where it says, *Your righteousness is like the mountains of God* (Ps 36:7). The mountains of God are, of course, his saints of whom it is said elsewhere, *Let the mountains receive peace for your people* (Ps 72:3). And many things are written about these mountains in figurative language, and it would now take too long to mention them. But God's making human beings righteous is something he does by a most hidden judgment because he does this by gratuitous grace. *But if it is because of grace, it is not because of works; otherwise, grace is no longer grace* (Rom 11:6). Good works, of course, begin from the time when we become righteous; we are not righteous because they came first. And this is the depth about which we already said much above. In the same psalm, after he had said, *Your righteousness is like the mountains of God*, he added immediately, *Your judgments are like a great abyss* (Ps 36:7). From this the psalmist comes to the salvation common to human beings and animals because that too derives from the mercy of God, and he says, *You will save human beings and animals, O Lord, as your mercy has been made great, O God* (Ps 36:8). He wanted us to understand from this that we also receive that eternal and immortal salvation of which the apostle says, *For we have been saved in hope* (Rom 8:24), in the same way as we receive this salvation common to human beings and animals, gratuitously, *not on the basis of works, lest anyone be lifted up in pride* (Eph 2:9). We do good works as the result of his having made us righteous. *For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus in good works that God prepared in order that we might walk in them* (Eph 2:10). And that salvation is gratuitous; it is said of it in another psalm, *Salvation is the Lord's, and your blessing is upon your people* (Ps 3:9).

72. As, then, by the words, *Salvation is the Lord's*, we do not understand that salvation by which the Lord is saved but that by which these people are saved whom he saves, so, when we read of the righteousness of God in the passage, *Not knowing the righteousness of God and wanting to establish their own righteousness*, we should not understand the righteousness by which God is righteous but

that by which human beings are righteous whom his grace makes righteous. For they are saved for the same reason they are righteous, because he goes on to explain his words, *It is not those who are healthy, but those who are ill who need a physician*, when he says, *I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners* (Mt 9:12-13). Therefore *he saved us, not according to the works of righteousness that we did but according to his mercy, through the bath of rebirth* (Ti 3:5), and in that grace *we have been saved in hope* (Rom 8:24). For this reason that psalm adds, *The children of men, however, will have hope under the protection of your wings. They will be inebriated by the riches of your house, and you will give them to drink of the torrent of your pleasure, for with you is the fountain of life, and in your light we shall see light. Extend your mercy to those who know you and your righteousness to those who have an upright heart* (Ps 36:8-11). Pride, then, is opposed to this righteousness of God, for by it one trusts as if in his own works, and for that reason there follows, *Let not the foot of pride come to me* (Ps 36:12).

73. This righteousness by which those who believe in him are righteous, now living from faith until by perfect righteousness they are brought to vision, just as by perfect salvation they will be brought to immortality, is the grace of the New Testament. For this reason the apostle says in another passage, *We are serving as ambassadors on behalf of Christ with God, so to speak, exhorting you through us; we pray that you be reconciled to God for the sake of Christ* (2 Cor 5:20). And then he adds, *He made him who had not known sin to be sin on our behalf*—that is, a sacrifice for sins. For in the law the sacrifices that were offered for sins were themselves called sins—in order that we might be the righteousness of God in him (2 Cor 5:21), that is, in order that in his body, which is the Church, of which he is the head, we might be the righteousness of God. *Not knowing this righteousness and wanting to establish their own*, that is, boasting over works as if they were their own, *they were not subject to the righteousness of God*. For this reason, after he had said in that psalm, *They will announce his righteousness*, he goes on and adds, *To the people who will be born whom the Lord has made*. Which is the people whom the Lord has not made insofar as they are human beings? For he has created even the animals, and by him every life and nature has been made and created. But we should understand, *whom the Lord made*, so that we understand that he made them not only insofar as they are human beings but also insofar as they are righteous, in accord with the statement of the apostle that I have already cited more than once, *We are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in order that we may walk in them* (Eph 2:10).

31, 74. The mutability of the rational soul, therefore, is warned in order that it might know that it cannot be righteous, saved, wise, and blessed except by participation in the immutable good and that it cannot be by its own will its own good, but only its own evil. By its own will it, of course, turns away from the immutable good, and it is damaged by that turning away, nor can it be healed by itself but only by the gratuitous mercy of its creator, which makes it live in this



life from faith in the hope of eternal life. Hence let it not have lofty thoughts but fear,<sup>62</sup> and with that chaste fear let it cling to God, who has purified it from its own uncleanness as if from spiritual fornication, by which it inordinately loved inferior goods. And let it not be exalted by human praise. Otherwise it might be among the foolish virgins who rejoice over another's praise—for this remains as the last of your questions—and who do good works on account of this empty praise, not on account of their conscience, where God is their witness. Let it rather be among the wise virgins, where it may say what the apostle says, *For our boast is the testimony of our conscience* (2 Cor 1:12). For this is to bring oil with one, not to buy it from merchants, that is, from flatterers. For flatterers sell their praise like oil to the foolish. Of this oil it is said in the psalm, *The righteous man will correct me with mercy and rebuke me, but the oil of the sinner will not anoint my head* (Ps 141:5). He chose to be reprehended by the righteous man with mercy and to be slapped, in a sense, rather than to be praised by the flattery of the sinner so that his head would swell with pride.

75. It seems to me to be the response of mockers when the wise virgins say to them, *Go rather to the merchants and buy your own* (Mt 25:9), just as in a certain book of wisdom it is written where wisdom speaks to those who scorn her, *And I shall laugh over your destruction* (Prv 1:26). But that response by which it is said to those asking for oil, *For fear that there might not be enough for us* (Mt 25:9), was said not in a lack of hope but with humility. For who so presumes upon his own conscience that he is certain that it can be enough for him in the judgment of God unless he judges the merciful with mercy? *For judgment will be without mercy for one who has not shown mercy* (Jas 2:13). But those lighted lamps are, of course, the good works of which the Lord says, *Let your works shine before human beings in order that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father who is in heaven* (Mt 5:16). The intention of the wise virgins is directed to the goal of wanting their good works to be seen by human beings, not in order that they may be praised by them but that God may be glorified, from whom they have the wherewithal to do good works. And in this way they rejoice in an interior good that is seen by God, where alms are given in secret so that the Father who sees in secret may give a reward.<sup>63</sup> And the lamps do not fail because they are fed by an interior oil, that is, by the intention of a good conscience, by which one does in God's sight for his glory whatever shines forth in the sight of human beings in good works. But the lamps of the foolish virgins who do not carry this oil with them fail, that is, their good works do not continuously shine when the human praise is withdrawn on account of which they were doing them, since they directed their intention to the goal of being seen by human beings, not of glorifying the Father who is in heaven. This intending of God's glory is lasting.

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62. See Rom 11:20.

63. See Mt 6:4.

By it the soul knows that it owes to God that it was made righteous for doing good works, and for this reason it loves to be praised in him, not in itself. In another place the man of God sings, *My soul will be praised in the Lord* (Ps 34:3) *in order that one who boasts may boast in the Lord* (1 Cor 1:31).

32, 76. But what does it mean that in the same reading from the gospel it is written that all fell asleep when the bridegroom was delayed?<sup>64</sup> If we understand this sleep in the sense that, when the judgment that Christ will come to hold is delayed, love will grow cold as iniquity abounds,<sup>65</sup> how will we include there the wise virgins, since they are rather among those of whom it is said, *But those who persevere up to the end will be saved* (Mt 24:13)? It was, then, said, *All fell asleep* (Mt 25:5), because not only the foolish who do their good works in the sight of human beings on account of human praise, but also the wise who do them in order that God may be praised, experience this death. Those from both groups die, after all, and this death is often called a falling asleep in the scriptures on account of the future resurrection, which is like an awakening. For this reason the apostle says, *But with regard to those who fall asleep, my brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be in ignorance* (1 Thes 4:12), and in another place, *Many of them remain up to the present, but some have fallen asleep* (1 Cor 15:6). And countless other testimonies to this are clearly found in the scriptures of both testaments. Hence, even the poet says, "Sleep, the blood-brother of death,"<sup>66</sup> and, if you pay attention, you will find many places even in worldly literature where death is compared to sleep. The Lord, therefore, indicated that there would come a time when amid the tribulations and temptations of this world his coming would be expected and hoped for from one moment to the next, as near at hand and imminent, and those who are seen to be in his family would prepare themselves for it. For this is what he meant when he said that they went forth *to meet the groom and the bride* (Mt 25:1). The groom is, of course, the Son of God, but the bride is either the body that he assumed from the Virgin, in which he will come, or the Church, which will then be seen more clearly, when its members rush together for the gathering of the whole body, and by their coming together its greatness will be seen.

33, 77. He called them virgins on account of their continence, but ten, that is, five and five, on account of the number of the senses of the body, in which continence dwells when one abstains from shameful and forbidden pleasures. The lamps, as has been said, are good works, especially those having to do with mercy, and that praiseworthy manner of living that also shines forth in the sight of human beings. But it is of great importance with what intention one acts. For this reason he calls some wise and the others foolish, but he distinguishes them

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64. See Mt 25:5.

65. See Mt 24:12.

66. Virgil, *The Aeneid* VI, 278.

because *the foolish did not bring oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels* (Mt 25:3-4), that is, in their hearts, where one participates in the innermost and highest good. Hence, in a certain psalm, after it had said, *Offer a sacrifice of righteousness, and hope in the Lord*, it says, *Many ask, "Who will show us good things?"* (Ps 4:6). Then, in order to reveal the good out of the love for which we ought to produce righteousness, that is, to offer a sacrifice of righteousness, it says, *The light of your countenance has been impressed upon us; you have given joy to my heart* (Ps 4:7). One who does good works and lives in a praiseworthy manner, even in the sight of human beings, with his intention fixed on that good of which he partakes to some extent and will partake more fully and more completely, has the oil with him in order that by it his good works that shine even in the sight of human beings may not be extinguished, because love does not grow cold in his heart as iniquity abounds, but perseveres up to the end. The foolish virgins do not have this oil with them because, in attributing it to themselves if they do any good work, they are necessarily puffed up with pride, and on account of this sin they find such delight in human praise that, if they do anything good, they seem to be warm and bright with joy over it.

34, 78. *But when the bridegroom was delayed, all fell asleep* (Mt 25:5). For he will not come when he is expected but in the middle of the night when it will be very obscure, that is, hidden, whether he is coming. For this reason it says that there was a cry raised in the middle of the night, *See, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him* (Mt 25:6). This cry is undoubtedly that trumpet that the apostle mentions where he says, *For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will rise free from corruption* (1 Cor 15:52). By the term "trumpet" he wants us to understand some most evident and brilliant sign, and elsewhere he calls it the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God.<sup>67</sup> In the gospel it is also called the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ, which those who are in tombs will hear, and they will go forth.<sup>68</sup> All those virgins, then, both the wise and the foolish, rise and light their lamps, that is, prepare to render an account of their works.

79. But then, because in the evidence of that cry and at the resurrection of the dead there will be no doubt about the imminent and already present judgment, all the solace of human praise will be taken away. For there will not be time to argue about someone else or to judge someone else or to please and to help someone else when *each will carry his own burden* (Gal 6:5) and will think about giving an account of his own actions. And for this reason the mind of the foolish virgins will be carried along by its own habit, but when it does not find human praise it will give up. For they did not sincerely say, *My praise is before you* (Ps 22:26), or, *My soul will be praised in the Lord* (Ps 33:3), nor did they boast in the Lord, when, not knowing the righteousness of God, they established their own righ-

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67. See 1 Thes 4:15.

68. See Jn 5:28-29.

teousness.<sup>69</sup> And for this reason they ask for oil from the wise, that is, for some consolation. They neither find nor receive any, when the wise virgins reply that they do not know whether their conscience is sufficient even for themselves by which they look for mercy under that judge. For, *when he has taken his seat on the throne, who will boast that he has a chaste heart, or who will boast that he is clean from sin* (Prv 20:8-9 LXX), unless *mercy triumphs over judgment?* (Jas 2:13). That mercy will be upon those who have done works of mercy with the intention that God may show them mercy, since they know that they have received what they have from him,<sup>70</sup> and they will not boast as if they had not received but had through themselves that by which they pleased God, like those foolish ones who were pleased with themselves as if over a good that they by themselves prepared for themselves and are praised by flatterers and those in error as if they themselves were really something. *But anyone who thinks he is something, though he is nothing, as the apostle says, deceives himself. But let each one test his own work, and then he will have reason to boast in himself and not in another* (Gal 6:3-4). This means: to carry oil with oneself and not to depend upon the praise of others. But what reason to boast will he have in himself except him to whom it is said, *You are my reason to boast and the one who lifts up my head* (Ps 3:4), in order that, as we must often say, *Let one who boasts boast in the Lord* (1 Cor 1:31)?

80. Hence the wisdom that dwells in the wise virgins in accord with what it said before, when it spoke to those who scorned and refused to accept sound teaching, *And I shall laugh at your destruction* (Prv 1:16), says to the foolish virgins, *Go rather to the merchants, and buy from them* (Mt 25:9), as if to say, "Where are those who deceived you with false praises since you were also deceived by yourselves because you boasted in yourselves and not in the Lord?" The words, *And while they went to buy oil, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready entered with him* (Mt 25:10), should, I think, be understood in the sense that with a sinful love of the heart they longed for empty glory, which they pursued with the pride of their empty mind. And the words, *While they went to buy oil, indicate this desire. The bridegroom came, and those who were prepared entered into the wedding feast with him*, that is, those who carry in their heart the true faith and true piety by which they can be joined to the number and society of the saints who boast, not in themselves, but in the Lord, in order that they may enter with them into that joy of which it is said, *Enter into the joy of your Lord* (Mt 25:21, 23). In that joy there will be the perfect participation in the immutable good; at present we have a certain pledge, as it were, of this through faith in that we live according to this grace insofar as we live for God, not for ourselves.

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69. See Rom 10:3.

70. See 1 Cor 4:7.

35. 81. Then there follow the words, *At last the other virgins also arrive and say, "Lord, Lord, open for us"* (Mt 25:11). It did not say that they had bought oil and thus had come, for there was then nowhere to buy it. Rather, they sought mercy too late when it was already the time for judging and for separating the good from the bad. But the bridegroom correctly replies to them, *Truly I say to you, I do not know you* (Mt 25:12). He, of course, says this from whom nothing is hidden. But, *I do not know you*, means nothing else than, "You do not know me since you chose to place your trust in yourselves rather than in me." For, when it is said that God knows us, he gives us knowledge of himself in order that we might in this way understand that we should not attribute to ourselves even the fact that we know God, but that we should attribute even that knowledge to his mercy. Hence, when the apostle said in a certain passage, *But now knowing God*, he corrected himself and said, *Rather known by God* (Gal 4:9). What else did he want us to understand but that God himself makes us know him? But no one knows God except one who understands that he is that highest and immutable good by participation in which one becomes good. This was stated at the end of this psalm, *They will announce his righteousness to the people who will be born whom the Lord has made* (Ps 22:32). For this reason there is also the verse found in another psalm, *He made us; we did not make ourselves* (Ps 100:3). For this does not refer to that nature by which we are human beings, the nature that has the same creator as heaven and earth and the stars and all living things have. Rather, it must refer to what the apostle says, *For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God prepared in order that we might walk in them* (Eph 2:10).

36. 82. I think that I have sufficiently answered your five questions, while I dwelt upon this question of mine concerning the grace of the New Testament as if it were the sixth question. On account of this grace *the Word became flesh* (Jn 1:14), that is, he who was the Son of God became man by assuming our nature, not by losing his. In this way the power was also given to us who receive him that we who were human beings might become children of God, changed for the better by participation in the immutable good, not for temporal happiness but for the adoption into eternal life, which is alone blessed. For that reason it also seemed good to go through the prophetic psalm whose first verse he called to mind in his Passion, showing how God abandons us and how in another sense he does not withdraw from us, as he gathers us to eternal goods, at times giving us temporal goods to our benefit and at times taking them away to our benefit, in order that we might learn not to cling to them. Otherwise we might scorn the interior light that pertains to the new life—and this is the reason why this psalm received the title, "For the welcoming of the morning," as if for welcoming the new light. And otherwise we might willingly dwell in the outer darkness, from which they are sent into the outermost darkness<sup>71</sup> who do not turn back from the outer darkness to what is

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71. See Mt 8:12, 22:13, 25:30.

internal, so that they are not allied with the devil and his angels and punished with final damnation. When we understand our sojourning in this life, therefore, we are crucified to the world, stretching out our hands to the breadth of good works, persevering up to the end<sup>72</sup> in longanimity, and having our heart raised up to *where Christ is seated at the right hand of God* (Col 3:1), attributing all this not to ourselves but to the mercy of him whose deep judgments exhaust everyone who examines them. For this is not a foolish fable but the useful truth of the breadth, length, height, and depth by which we may come to the supereminent knowledge of the love of Christ and be filled with all the fullness of God.<sup>73</sup>

37. 83. I know, however, that it was not out of needless concern that I wanted to commend to you more fully the grace of the New Testament on the occasion of the questions you proposed to me. For that grace has its enemies who are disturbed by its depth and want to attribute not to God but to themselves the fact that they are good. Nor are they the sort of people whom you would readily hold in contempt; rather, they live lives of continence and are praiseworthy for good works. They do not believe in a false Christ like the Manichees and very many other heretics, but believe that the same true Christ, who was equal to and coeternal with the Father, became man and came to earth, and they await his coming again. But they do not, nonetheless, know *the righteousness of God* and want to establish their own righteousness (Rom 10:3). For it was not in vain that, when the Lord mentioned those who entered with him into the wedding feast and those whom he locked out and to whom he said, *I do not know you* (Mt 25:12), he called both groups “virgins” on account of their continence and “five” on account of their subduing the concupiscence of the flesh, which is found in the five senses. And he said that both groups carried lamps on account of the praise of good works and of a good life shining most brightly in the sight of human beings, and he said that both groups went to meet the bridegroom on account of the expectation with which the coming of Christ is hoped for. But he called some wise and others foolish because the wise received oil in their vessels, but the foolish did not take oil with them. He shows that they are equal in so many ways and differ in this way alone; for this reason alone he gives them different and contrary names.

84. For what is so much the same as two groups of virgins, each five in number, each group carrying lamps, each group going to meet the bridegroom? And what is as opposite as wise and foolish? The wise have 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 unless God grants it, and attributing it to wisdom to know whose gift this is.<sup>74</sup> But in not giving thanks to the giver of all good things the foolish have become vain in their thoughts, and their foolish heart has

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72. See Mt 10:22.

73. See Eph 3:19.

74. See Wis 8:21.

become dark. Though they say that they are wise, they have become foolish.<sup>75</sup> We should, of course, by no means give up hope concerning them now before we fall asleep, but if they have fallen asleep with that disposition when that cry goes up announcing the bridegroom's arrival, and if they remain outside, when they awake, that is, when they rise, not because they are not virgins, but because they are foolish virgins insofar as they do not know from whom they have what they have, they will deservedly remain outside, since they do not bring with them the disposition of internal grace.

85. When, therefore, you find such people, let them not win you over to their empty vessels; rather, win them over to your full ones. For this reason the apostle says, *Whoever thinks that he knows something does not yet know anything in the way he ought to know it* (1 Cor 8:2), and to show what he meant, he immediately said, *But whoever loves God is known by God* (1 Cor 8:3). He did not want to express this in the words: "He knows God," but by saying, *He is known by God*, he wanted to teach more explicitly that we have from God the fact that we love him. For *the love of God is poured out in our hearts*, not through ourselves but *through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us* (Rom 5:5). But it is necessarily the case that one does not love God enough who thinks that he was made good not by God but by himself. How can such a person boast not in himself but in the Lord?<sup>76</sup> For one who boasts that he is good ought to boast in him by whom he was made good, and for this reason it follows that one who thinks that he was made good by himself boasts in himself and not in the Lord. But the whole intention of the grace of the New Testament by which we have our heart raised up, because *every best gift and every perfect gift is from above* (Jas 1:17), has no other aim but that we may not be ungrateful, and that act of thanksgiving has no other aim but *that one who boasts may boast in the Lord* (1 Cor 1:31).

You have a book and, although it is a long one, it is nonetheless in my opinion not a superfluous one. But grow to love to read the writings of the Church as well, and you will not find many questions to ask me. Rather, as you read and ponder them, if with a pure heart you also ask God, the giver of all goods, you will fully learn everything that is worthy of knowing, or at least very many things, more under his inspiration than at the admonition of some human being. And yet, by that very unerring judgment by which we approve someone who admonishes us externally, what else do we bear witness to than that we have the internal light as our teacher?

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75. See Rom 1:21-22.

76. See 1 Cor 1:31.

## Letter 141

Before 14 June 412, Augustine drafted a letter in the name of the Fathers of the Council of Cirta to the Donatist laity in order to inform them about the course and results of the Conference of Carthage in 411. Because the Catholic bishops have heard that the Donatist bishops claim that Marcellinus, who presided at the conference, was bribed to pronounce judgment in favor of the Catholics, they are writing to the Donatists to explain the truth of the matter (paragraph 1). They explain the measures taken at the conference in order that the truth might be revealed and preserved in the records (paragraph 2). The Donatist bishops first tried to prevent the case from being heard, but failed (paragraph 3). The Donatist bishops admitted that they had nothing to say against the Catholic Church that was spread throughout the whole world since there were so many passages of scripture against them (paragraph 4). The Catholic bishops state that anyone separated from the Catholic Church is separated from Christ for this very reason, but that no one in the Church is rendered guilty by partaking of the sacraments in communion with sinners (paragraph 5). The case of Caecilian, the Catholic bishop of Carthage when the Donatist schism began, which is distinct from that of the Church, is compared with that of Maximian, a bishop who split away from the Donatists and was accepted back without repetition of baptism (paragraph 6). There were in fact bishops guilty of surrendering the sacred books among the Donatists who condemned Caecilian (paragraph 7). Furthermore, Caecilian's innocence is proven by the public records (paragraph 8). When the Donatist bishops produced evidence in order to show that Caecilian had been condemned, they were laughed at, because their evidence showed that he was in fact acquitted (paragraph 9). Furthermore, Felix of Aptungi, Caecilian's ordaining bishop, was shown by the records to have been innocent (paragraph 10). The Donatist bishops at the conference added their signatures to all this evidence that had been produced against them (paragraph 11). Hence, the Catholic bishops urge the Donatists not to be misled by the claims of their bishops but to return to the unity of the Catholic Church (paragraphs 12 and 13).

*Silvanus, the Primate, Valentine, Aurelius, Innocent, Maximinus, Optatus, Augustine, Donatus, and the other bishops from the Council of Cirta send greetings to the Donatists.*

1. Rumor has frequently brought it to our ears that your bishops say that the imperial commissioner<sup>1</sup> was bribed with money so that he would pronounce sentence against them and that you readily believe this, and that, for this reason, many of you still do not want to yield to the truth. Hence, we have decided, because the love of the Lord compels us, to send these documents to you from our council in order that you may, first of all, be advised that your bishops, who lost their case and were proven guilty, have spread these lies. Even in their own

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1. That is, Marcellinus, who presided at the Conference of Carthage the previous year.



rescript, which they made for that conference and which they certified by their names and signatures, when they said that we were traitors and their persecutors, they were caught and proven guilty of falsehood and of a most evident lie. Because they wanted to boast of the large number of their fellow bishops, they even inserted the name of one who had died among the names of some who were absent, and when they were asked where he was, they were blinded by sudden confusion and admitted that he had died on the way. And when they were asked how he who had died on the way could have added his signature at Carthage, they were more deeply upset and involved themselves in another lie, when they answered that he had died while returning from Carthage. They were absolutely unable to get out of that lie. See the sort of men you believe either about the old act of surrendering the books or about the bribing of the imperial commissioner: those individuals who could not without the crime of falsifying the record add their signatures to their rescript in which they charged us with the crime of surrendering the books. Hence, we have inserted into this letter those points that we believed most necessary and have summarized them for fear that you may not find it easy to consult the large volumes of the proceedings or may think it laborious to read them.

2. Both we and your bishops came to Carthage, and we assembled together, something that your bishops earlier refused to do and said was improper. There were chosen from us and from them seven from our side and seven from theirs in order that they might speak in the name of all. There were chosen another seven on each side with whom they might consult when it was necessary. There were chosen four on each side who would stand guard over the recording of the proceedings in order that it would not be said that anyone had falsified something. We and they also provided four secretaries from each side in order that in pairs they might alternate with the court reporters so that no one of us might complain that he said something that was not recorded. In addition to all this carefulness there was also the further provision that both we and they, as well as the judge himself, would sign our names to our statements in order that no one might say that something was altered in those proceedings even later. For, since the same proceedings have become known in every place where they needed to become known, while those who had signed them were still living, the truth confirmed by such guarantees will last even for generations to come. Do not, therefore, be ungrateful to God's great mercy that has been offered to you by means of such carefulness. No excuse now remains; hearts that are still opposed to so great a manifestation of the truth are much too hard, far too diabolical.

3. Look, the bishops of your faction, whom all chose to speak for all, tried as best they could to prevent the case from being heard at all, though on its account a great number of bishops from both sides had come to Carthage from throughout Africa and from distant places. And though every soul awaited anxiously the outcome of so great an assembly, those bishops fiercely tried to

see that nothing would be done. Why did they do this if not because they knew that their case was weak and because they could have no doubt that they would easily be defeated if the case were heard? Their very attitude, therefore, by which they feared that the case would be heard, showed that they were already defeated. For, if they had obtained what they wanted, namely, that the conference itself would not now take place and that the truth would also not be revealed by our discussions, what answer were they going to give you when they returned from Carthage? What were they going to show you? I believe they were going to bring forth the proceedings and say to you, "We insisted that the case not be heard; they insisted that it be heard. You are waiting to see what we did; look, read where we defeated them so that the conference was not held." Perhaps you too would reply, if you had courage, "If, then, you were not going to do anything, why did you go? Or rather, since you accomplished nothing, why have you returned?"

4. Finally, after they were unable to achieve what they tried, that is, that the conference not be held, the discussion showed what they feared when they were defeated on every issue. After all, they admitted that they had nothing to say against the Catholic Church, which is spread throughout the whole world. For they were overwhelmed by the divine testimonies of the scriptures. These scriptures describe how the Church, beginning from Jerusalem,<sup>2</sup> grew in all the places where the apostles preached—and they left the names of the same places written in their letters and in their acts—and how from those places it spread through other nations. The Donatist bishops declared in plain language that they had no argument against this Church, and here our victory in the name of the Lord is most evident. For, when they uphold the truth of the Church with which it is clear that we are in communion but they are not, they testify that they have already lost at that point. And, if you are wise, they indicate to you with perfect clarity what you ought to give up and what you ought to hold onto, not with the falsity with which they do not as yet cease to lie to you but with the truth that they were forced to admit when they were defeated.

5. Whoever, then, separates himself from this Catholic Church, no matter how praiseworthy he believes his life to be, will not have life because of this sin alone of being separated from the unity of Christ. Rather, the anger of God will remain over him.<sup>3</sup> But whoever lives a good life in this Church will suffer no harm from the sins of others, because in her *each will carry his own burden* (Gal 6:5), as the apostle says. And *whoever in her eats the body of Christ unworthily eats and drinks to his own condemnation* (1 Cor 11:19), as the apostle himself also wrote. But when he says, *he eats to his own condemnation*, he shows clearly enough that he does not eat to another's condemnation but to his own. This is

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2. See Acts 1:8.

3. See Jn 3:36.

what we did; this was what we proved and obtained: that being in communion with sinful persons does not make anyone guilty through sharing with them in the sacraments but only through consenting with them to their deeds. For, if one does not consent with them in their evil deeds, a sinful person has his own guilt and responsibility but does not cause any harm to someone else whom he does not have as an accomplice in his evil action.

6. These bishops were also forced to admit this point in perfectly clear language, not at the time when we said this but later when something else was at issue. For we had come to the question of Caecilian,<sup>4</sup> which we distinguished from the question of the Church, in order that, if he were perhaps found guilty, we would declare him anathema but would not on his account leave the Church of Christ, which Caecilian could not have damaged by his own wrongdoing. When, therefore, we had come to the case of Caecilian and they read the account of the Council of Carthage<sup>5</sup> where they recited the judgments of seventy bishops, more or less, that were pronounced against Caecilian in his absence, we replied to them that this council did no damage to the absent Caecilian, just as the council of more bishops from the sect of Donatus did no damage to the absent Primian, when approximately one hundred bishops condemned him in the affair of Maximian.<sup>6</sup> The case against Maximian was mentioned. From it they know that the Donatists took back in their full dignity even those bishops whom they had condemned and that they accepted and did not nullify the baptism conferred in the sacrilegious schism of Maximian; they know that in their judgment at Bagai, by which they condemned them, they granted to some in that schism a delay and said that cuttings from the sacrilegious vine of Maximian had not defiled them.<sup>7</sup> After this case reached their ears, they were afraid and upset and, having forgotten how they earlier argued against us, they immediately said, "One case does not prejudice another, nor does one person prejudice another."<sup>8</sup> And they supported with their own words what we said before about the Church, namely, that the case and person of Caecilian, whatever it has been, could be prejudicial not only not to the Catholic Church overseas, against which they admitted that they have nothing to say, but also not to the African church, which

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4. Caecilian was the Catholic bishop of Carthage at the time when the Donatist schism began.
  5. The council was held in 312 and presided over by Secundus of Tigisi. Caecilian refused to appear, and Majorinus was elected bishop in opposition to him. Majorinus soon died and was succeeded by Donatus, from whom the sect took its name.
  6. Primian was the Donatist bishop of Carthage. Because of some of his excesses, an opposition party was formed, and at a council held at Cabarsussi in Byzacena on 24 June 393, the more moderate Donatist bishops ordained Maximian as bishop in place of Primian. As a result the Maximianists split off from the Donatists.
  7. Primian, who was deposed by Maximian in the Council of Cabarsussi, gathered three hundred and ten Donatist bishops at Bagai in Numidia, where he excommunicated Maximian along with his bishops and priests on 24 April 394.
  8. See *Answer to the Donatists after the Conference 4*, 5: PL 43, 655. Augustine quotes the sentence twelve times in this work.

is united to her in communion, if Maximian, who with his other companions condemned Primian, and if Felician,<sup>9</sup> who condemned Primian at the same time and afterwards was condemned by the sect of Donatus in the trial of Primian, is not prejudicial to the sect of Donatus, to which he is now united, having been taken back as a bishop, as he was before, and if Maximian is not prejudicial to his companions, to whom they granted a delay, saying that they were not polluted by him with whom they were, because “one case does not prejudice another, nor does one person prejudice another.”

7. What more do you ask for? They of course embellished the proceedings with many needless words. And because they could not bring it about that the conference not take place, they brought it about, by saying a lot, that it be difficult to read what did take place. But even these few words of theirs ought to be enough for you not to hate the unity of the Catholic Church on account of some unknown crimes of some unknown people. For, as they said, read again, and signed, “One case does not prejudice another, nor does one person prejudice another.” And in the case of Caecilian, which we undertook to defend, though it is independent of the case of the Church, in order that their slanders might be revealed in it as well, they were most clearly defeated, and they could not prove any of those accusations that they brought against Caecilian. Moreover, we also produced the episcopal proceedings concerning the charges of surrendering the sacred books, from which we read out that some of those bishops who condemned Caecilian in his absence were undoubtedly traitors. Because they had nothing to say against the proceedings, they made false statements, but they could in no way prove them.

8. Moreover, they also admitted, or rather proclaimed as a matter of great glory, that Caecilian was accused by their predecessors before the emperor, Constantine. And they added the lie that at their accusations he was condemned by the emperor. See, they are defeated on this point too, from which they are accustomed to spread out the clouds of error, stirring up hatred for us and making us hateful to you because we brought a case belonging to the Church before the emperor. See, their predecessors, of whose names they boast, brought a case belonging to the Church before the emperor; they went after Caecilian by accusing him before the emperor, and they said that he had been condemned. Let them not now mislead you with their utterly vain and deceitful words. Return to your own heart;<sup>10</sup> fear the Lord; consider the truth; abandon falsity. After all, no matter what you have already suffered from the imperial laws—and you do not suffer for justice but for injustice—you cannot say that we are unjust because we ought not to have dealt with you in such a way that the emperor restrained you from your iniquity. For your bishops admitted that they dealt with Caecilian in

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9. On Felician of Musti, see Letter 70.

10. See 1s 46:8.

the way in which you do not want us to deal with you. And yet the fact that they went after Caecilian before the emperor is well established from their own admissions and declarations, but that Caecilian was condemned by the emperor is not proven at all. In fact, it is proven that, despite the accusations and persecutions of their predecessors, he was first acquitted twice by bishops<sup>11</sup> and afterward by the emperor himself. They themselves attested to this by later producing, as if in support of their case, such facts, as were found rather to be against them, and the documents they produced were read out in support of Caecilian. Whomever, therefore, they wanted to accuse, they could not prove their charges by any certain documents, but whatever we said in defense of the Church's case and in defense of Caecilian's, they supported by their own words and by documents they themselves produced.

9. For they first of all produced the book of Optatus,<sup>12</sup> as if to prove from it that Caecilian was condemned by the emperor. When that book was read in opposition to them and rather showed that Caecilian was acquitted, everyone laughed at them. But because the laughter could not be taken down by the secretaries, they testified in the proceedings that they were laughed at. Again, they read out and brought forth the document that their predecessors gave to the emperor, Constantine, in which they strongly complained that the previously mentioned emperor was persecuting them, and in that way they showed by the same document that they were defeated by Caecilian before the same emperor and that their statement was false that Caecilian was condemned by the emperor. Thirdly, they brought forth the letter of the same Constantine sent to Verinus, the vicar, in which he shows his strong hatred for them and for this reason says that they should be released from exile and left to their own madness. For God had already begun to punish them, and in that way they also proved by this letter of the emperor that they said something false in saying that Caecilian was condemned by the emperor, since the emperor rather showed that they were defeated by Caecilian when he sternly cursed them and thus ordered that they be released from exile in order that they might be punished by the justice of God, as they had already begun to be.

10. Afterwards, they introduced into the discussion the case of Felix of Aptungi, who ordained Caecilian, saying that the same Felix, by whom Caecilian was ordained, was a traditor, and they brought out a letter of the same emperor, Constantine, in favor of Caecilian and against themselves. In the letter he wrote to the proconsul that Ingentius should be sent to his court.<sup>13</sup> This Ingentius, however, had admitted in the hearing of Aelian, the proconsul, that he

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11. Caecilian was acquitted in the Council of Rome on 2-4 October 313, presided over by Pope Miltiades, and in the Council of Arles on 1 August 314.

12. Optatus, bishop of Milevis, wrote a book against the Donatists.

13. On Ingentius and his summons to the imperial court, see Letter 88, which quotes the letter from the emperors.

made a false statement against Felix, Caecilian's ordaining bishop. The Donatists, therefore, said that the emperor had good reason to have Ingentius sent to him, since the case against Caecilian was still pending, and they were trying to inject the most tenuous suspicion that, after Ingentius was summoned to the court, the emperor could then pronounce judgment against Caecilian and could by a later ruling rescind that verdict of his that we had read out in which he heard both sides and acquitted Caecilian. But they were told that they should read this later ruling instead, and they produced absolutely nothing. That letter of the emperor, however, in which he ordered that Ingentius<sup>14</sup> be sent to him, which they read out against themselves and in support of Caecilian, contained the statement that Aelian, the proconsul, gave a suitable hearing to the case of Felix and that it was determined that the same Felix was innocent of the crime of surrendering the books. But the emperor ordered that Ingentius be sent to his court in order that those who were there and did not cease to beseech him every day could be shown and made to know that it was in vain that they wanted to stir up hatred for Caecilian and rise up against him in violence.

11. Who would believe that they read out these documents against themselves and in our favor, if the will of God almighty had not brought it about that the proceedings contained not only their words but also their handwritten names? For, if anyone carefully takes note of the succession of consuls<sup>15</sup> and of the days that are contained in the proceedings, he will find, first of all, that Caecilian was acquitted by an episcopal court. Then, not much later, the case of Felix of Aptungi was heard by Aelian, the proconsul, and in it he was shown to be innocent. Over that case Ingentius was summoned to the court. And long afterwards the emperor heard both sides and settled the case; in that hearing he declared that Caecilian was innocent and that the others were utter slanderers. In that succession of consuls and days it is clearly shown that they stated falsely and slanderously that the emperor changed his judgment after Ingentius was summoned to the court and that he later condemned Caecilian whom he had earlier acquitted. They, however, not only could not read anything on this question in their own favor and read so much against themselves, but they also were quite evidently shown by the succession of consuls that, after the termination of the case of Felix in the proconsul's court, over which Ingentius was summoned to the imperial court, and not just by a short period, but long afterwards, Caecilian was acquitted in the court of the previously mentioned emperor with both sides present.

12. Let them, therefore, not tell you that we bribed the judge with money. What else, after all, are losers accustomed to say? Or, if we gave something to the judge in order that he would rule against them and for us, what did we give

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14. See Letter 88, 4.

15. The names of the consuls were used to refer to the years.

them in order that they would not only say but read out so much against themselves and for us? Or do they perhaps want us to thank them in your presence because, though they say that we bribed the judge with money, they offered to us gratuitously all those many things that they said and read out in our favor and in opposition to themselves? Or at least, if they say that they defeated us because they managed the case of Caecilian better than we did, clearly believe them on this. After all, we thought that it was enough to read two documents in his defense, but they produced four.

13. But why should we make this letter burdensome with more details? If you are willing to believe us, believe us, and let us together hold onto the unity that God commands and loves. But if you are unwilling to believe us, read the proceedings, or allow them to be read to you, and test for yourselves whether what we have written is true. If, however, you are not willing to do any of these things and you still desire to follow the error of the sect of Donatus, which has been refuted by perfectly clear truth, we will not be responsible for your punishment when you regret this afterwards, when it is too late. But if you do not hold in contempt what God has given you, and after a case that has been pursued with such diligence and brought to light with such diligence you abandon your misguided habit and agree to the peace and unity of Christ, we will rejoice over your correction. And the sacraments of Christ, which you have in the sacrilege of schism for your condemnation, will be beneficial and salutary for you when you have Christ as your head in the Catholic peace, where love covers a multitude of sins.<sup>16</sup> We have written this to you on the eighteenth day before the Kalends of July in the ninth consulate of the most pious Honorius Augustus<sup>17</sup> in order that this letter may reach each of you as soon as possible.

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16. See I Pt 4:8.

17. That is, on 14 June 412.

## Letter 142

In approximately 412 Augustine wrote to Saturninus, Eufrates, other clerics, and laypersons who have returned to the unity of the Church from the Donatist schism. He tells these people of his joy over their return and prays that they may not be saddened over his absence, since they are all together in the one body of Christ and the one house of God (paragraph 1). This house of God is not confined to one corner of the world but is spread throughout the world, as had been foretold in the Psalms (paragraph 2). Because of such testimonies, the enemies of the Church have ceased to speak against the Church overseas, which they confessed to be the Catholic Church in which we tolerate the chaff amid the wheat in order that we may remain with the wheat on the threshing-floor (paragraph 3). Finally, Augustine exhorts these people to carry out their offices and ministry in the Church and to pray with him for those still clinging to the Donatist sect (paragraph 4).

*To his most beloved lords and his brother priests, Saturninus and Eufrates, to the clerics who are with you, and to all who have returned to the unity and peace of Christ, Augustine sends greetings in the Lord.*

1. Your coming has brought us joy, but do not let our absence cause you sadness. For we are in that Church that by God's mercy, though it stretches in every direction and is spread throughout the world, is nonetheless the one great body of the one great head, and that head is the savior himself, as the apostle says.<sup>1</sup> But concerning the exaltation of this head, which was going to take place after his resurrection, the prophet predicted long before, *Be exalted above heaven. O God* (Ps 57:12), and because, after he was exalted above the heavens, the Church was going to fill the whole earth with bountiful fecundity, the same psalm goes on to add, *And let your glory be seen over all the earth* (Ps 57:12). Hence, my dearest friends, let us remain with an unwavering mind and most firm heart under so exalted a head in so glorious a body, in which we are members of one another.<sup>2</sup> Hence, even if I were absent far away in most remote lands, we would be together in him from the unity of whose body we ought not to withdraw. For, if we were in one house, we would, of course, be said to be together. How much more are we together when we are together in one body! And yet the Truth himself testifies that we are in one house because holy scripture, which says that the Church is the body of Christ, also says that the same Church is the house of God.<sup>3</sup>

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1. See Eph 5:23 and Col 1:18.

2. See 1 Tm 3:15.

3. See Eph 4:12, 1 Pt 2:4-6 and 4:17, Ti 1:11, and 1 Tm 1:16.



2. But this house is not built in one corner of the world but throughout the whole world. For this reason the psalm in whose title we read, *When the house was built after the captivity*, begins as follows: *Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth* (Ps 96:1). In the old condition of the old human being, the devil, of course, held the world captive. When the house is built after this captivity, the renewal of the faithful is signified by the new human being. For this reason the apostle says, *Strip off your old self, and put on the one who was created in God's likeness* (Eph 4:22). And since this is taking place throughout all the world in the Catholic unity, just as it says in another psalm: *And over all the earth your glory is spread* (Ps 57:12), so in this psalm after it said, *Sing to the Lord a new song*, in order to show when the house is built in this new song, it immediately added, *Sing to the Lord, all the earth*. This same psalm exhorts the workers who are building this great house when it goes on to say, *Announce well from day to day his salvation; proclaim among the nations his glory, in all peoples his wonderful works* (Ps 96:2-3), and a little later it says: *Bring to the Lord, families of nations, bring to the Lord glory and honor* (Ps 96:7). Elsewhere I said which house this is, that is, the Church of God.<sup>4</sup>

3. In the face of these and other testimonies of this sort to this great house, testimonies which are found in great numbers in the whole of scripture, its enemies have ceased and admit that they have no case against the Church overseas, which they nonetheless admitted was Catholic. We are united to this Church in order that we might deserve to be united to the members of Christ, and we embrace the frame of his body with the disposition of a most faithful love. For whoever lives a bad life in the unity of this Church *eats and drinks to his own condemnation* (1 Cor 11:29), as the apostle says. But whoever lives a good life suffers no harm from the case of another or the sins of others. So too, when they were pressed concerning the case of Maximinus, even the Donatists were forced to admit in this way with their own lips that "one case does not prejudice another, nor does one person prejudice another."<sup>5</sup> We were, nonetheless, concerned about one another like members of one body in order that whichever of us pertains, with the Lord's help, to the future barn may tolerate in the meanwhile the straw, together with us, on the threshing-floor. Otherwise we might abandon the threshing-floor of the Lord on account of the straw destined for the future fire.

4. Perform faithfully and joyfully the ecclesiastical duties that pertain to you according to your level in the hierarchy, and carry out your ministry with sincerity on account of that God under whom we are fellow servants and to whom we bear in mind that we will give an account of our actions. For this reason your heart ought to overflow with mercy, because one who does not show

4. See *Answer to the Writings of Petilian I*, 13, 14: PL 43, 252.

5. See *Answer to the Donatists after the Conference 4*, 5: PL 43, 655.

mercy will face a judgment without mercy.<sup>6</sup> And for this reason pray along with us for those who are still without your joy in order that the infirmity of their carnal mind, which they picked up and contracted from their long-standing habit, may be healed. After all, who does not understand how good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell in unity,<sup>7</sup> if the joyousness touches sound lips and if a mind that enjoys the sweetness of love spits out the bitterness of division? God, however, to whom we pray for them, is powerful and merciful so that he can draw even them to salvation on any occasion. May the Lord keep you in peace.

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6. See Jas 2:13.

7. See Ps 133:1.

## Letter 143

Probably in 412, Augustine wrote to Marcellinus, his friend and the imperial commissioner. He first responds to Marcellinus' question about how Pharaoh's magicians found more water to turn into blood after all the water in Egypt had been turned into blood (paragraph 1). With regard to Marcellinus' question about Augustine's own book, Augustine admits that he has made progress over time and what he has said does not have to be defended in the same way as scripture does (paragraph 2). Augustine insists that those who claim that he was never in error in his writings do not know him or love him but someone else instead of him (paragraph 3). In fact, he is holding up the publication of *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* and *The Trinity* precisely because he wants to check them more carefully (paragraph 4). His statement in the third book of *Free Will* does not endorse any of the four theories about the origin of souls that he had set forth there (paragraph 5). On any of these four hypotheses it is true that after the sin the nature of the soul, located among inferior bodies, does not rule its body as it wishes (paragraph 6). Augustine explains that he is certain that the soul is immortal and a creature, but has found no certain argument or decisive passage of scripture to settle the question of the soul's origin (paragraph 7). He examines a passage from Ecclesiastes and shows that it causes problems for the view that individual souls are created in individual bodies and for the view that souls are created elsewhere and slip into bodies on their own accord (paragraphs 8 and 9). And yet, the same passage can also be interpreted so that it favors traducianism and the creation of souls outside their bodies (paragraph 10). He concludes that anyone who wants to defend any of these four views needs to produce a clear proof that cannot be contradicted or a scriptural passage that cannot be interpreted otherwise (paragraph 11). Finally, Augustine replies to an objection to the virginity of Mary on the grounds of the singularity of a virgin giving birth (paragraph 12).

*To his excellent lord and rightly distinguished and very dear son, Marcellinus, Augustine sends greetings in the Lord.*

1. When I was replying to you, I looked for your letter that I received by means of my holy brother and fellow bishop, Boniface, and I did not find it. I recall, nonetheless, that you asked in it how the magicians of Pharaoh discovered, after all the water of Egypt was changed into blood, the means to do something like that.<sup>1</sup> This question is usually resolved in two ways, either because they had available sea water or—what is more credible—because those plagues did not occur in those areas in which the children of Israel were found. For this is stated most clearly in certain passages of that scripture, and it teaches us what we ought to understand, even where it is not stated.

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1. See Ex 7:20-22.

2. That letter of yours, however, that the priest Urbanus carried, poses a question for me, not from the books of God but from my books that I wrote called *Free Will*. On questions of that sort I do not spend much energy, because, even if my view cannot be defended by a clear reason, it is mine, not that of that author whose meaning it is wrong to criticize, even when, because he has not been understood, one gets from it an idea that deserves to be criticized. I therefore admit that I am among that number who write while developing and develop while writing. Hence, if I said something that is either lacking in caution or lacking in learning, which is rightly reprehended not only by others who can see it but also by myself, because I ought to be able to see it, at least afterwards if I am developing, it should come as no surprise, nor should I be saddened over it. Rather, it should be pardoned, and I should be grateful, not because I made a mistake but because it has been criticized. For a man loves himself far too wrongly if he wants others to remain in error in order that his own error may remain hidden. After all, how much better and more useful it is that, where he himself was in error, others are not in error in order that by their admonition he might be set free from error! And if he refuses to be set free, he would at least not have companions in error. For, if God grants me what I want, namely, that I may gather together and point out in some work created for this purpose whatever rightly displeases me in all my works, then people will see that I am not partial toward myself.

3. But if you who love me very much maintain, in opposition to those people by whose malice or ignorance or intelligence I am criticized, that I am so great a man that in your opinion I would never have erred in my writings, you are laboring in vain. You have not taken up a good case. You will easily lose it if I am the judge, since I am not pleased when my dearest friends think me to be the sort of person that I am not. For they do not love me at all but someone else instead of me under my name, if they do not love what I am but what I am not. For they love me to the extent that they know me and believe the truth about me, but to the extent that they ascribe to me what they do not find in me, they love instead of me someone else of the sort they think that I am. Tully, the greatest author of the Roman language, says of a certain person, "He never uttered a word that he would want to take back."<sup>2</sup> Though this praise seems very high, it is easier, nonetheless, to believe this of someone very stupid rather than of the perfect sage. For to the extent that those whom the ordinary people call "morons" are out of touch with common sense and are more absurd and silly, they are more likely not to utter any word that they would want to take back. For to regret saying something bad or foolish or inappropriate is the mark of an intelligent person. But if we understand Cicero's statement in a favorable sense and believe that someone has existed who never uttered a word that he would want to take back, because he

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2. Cicero, *Fragmenta incerta* 1, 11.

said everything wisely, we should with a most salutary piety believe this of the men of God who spoke under the guidance of the Holy Spirit rather than of that man whom Cicero praises in that way. I myself am so far removed from that excellence that, if I do not utter any word that I would want to take back, I am more like a fool than a sage. The writings of that man, of course, who never uttered a word not that he would want to take back but that he ought to take back, are most worthy of the highest authority. Whoever has not yet attained this ought to be content with the second place, that is, one of modesty, since he cannot have the first place, that is, one of wisdom. Since he could not say carefully everything without any need of regret, let him regret what he knows he should not have said.

4. Since, then, it is not true that I say no words or say only a few that I would want to take back if I could, as certain very dear friends of mine think, but rather more words than perhaps even my critics think, that statement of Tully holds no attraction for me where he said, "He never uttered a word that he would want to take back." But Horace's statement distresses me, "A word once spoken cannot be retrieved."<sup>3</sup> This is why I hold onto those books filled with most dangerous questions, namely, *Genesis* and *The Trinity*,<sup>4</sup> longer than you want and tolerate in order that, if they cannot fail to have some points that it would be right to criticize, these might at least be fewer than they could have been if they were published in headlong haste and without more reflection. For, as your letter indicates—and my holy brother and fellow bishop, Florentius, also wrote this to me—you urge that I publish them in order that I can defend them while I am still living in this flesh, since either carping enemies or even less intelligent friends have perhaps begun to criticize them on certain points. You say this, of course, because you do not think that there is anything in them that could be blamed by sound reason; otherwise, you would not urge me to publish them but rather to correct them more carefully. I, however, rather look to judges who are true and strict about the truth, and I want first to set myself before them in order that they may find only those points to criticize that I could not see despite my careful scrutiny.

5. Since this is so, when I was dealing with the rational substance, I thought to say in the third book of *Free Will*: "But after the sin the soul, located among inferior bodies, rules its own body, not in every way as it chooses but as the laws of the universe allow."<sup>5</sup> Let those who think that I stated something as certain about the human soul and determined that it either comes from the parents through propagation or sinned in the actions done in a higher and heavenly life in order that it might merit to be enclosed in corruptible flesh pay careful attention and

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3. Horace, *The Art of Poetry* (*Ars poetica*) 390.

4. Augustine refers to *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*. He held back *The Trinity* so long that the first twelve books of it were stolen by impatient monks and published before they had his final approval.

5. Augustine, *Free Will* III, 11, 34.

see that I thoroughly weighed my words so that I retained what is certain, namely, that after the sin of the first human being, other human beings were born and are being born in sinful flesh, which the Lord came to heal in the likeness of sinful flesh. And thus all my words read so that, they rule out none of those four opinions that I later explained and distinguished, without espousing any one of them. Rather, for the time being, having set aside a discussion of them, I settled the issue I was dealing with so that, whichever of them might be true, God would surely be praised.

6. For, whether all souls are propagated from that one or whether souls are individually created in individual bodies, or whether they are created outside bodies and sent into them, or whether they plunge into bodies of their own accord, this rational creature, that is, the nature of the human soul, was undoubtedly placed in lower, that is, earthly bodies after the sin and does not rule its body in every way as it chooses, given that the sin of the first human being remains. I did not say: "After its sin," or, "After it sinned," but, "After the sin," in order that later, if possible, a thorough discussion might explain whether we should understand that it was correct to say "its sin" or "the sin of the parents of its flesh," where we said, "After the sin the soul, located among inferior bodies, rules its own body, not in every way as it chooses." For the flesh has desires opposed to the spirit,<sup>6</sup> and we groan under our burden,<sup>7</sup> and the corruptible body weighs down the soul.<sup>8</sup> And who could recount all the difficulties of our carnal weakness? They will, of course, no longer exist when this corruptible body puts on incorruptibility<sup>9</sup> so that this mortal body is swallowed up by life. And so, then the soul will rule a spiritual body in every way as it chooses, but now it does not rule the body in every way but as the laws of the universe allow. Those laws have determined that bodies "that come to be die, and those that grow become old."<sup>10</sup> For, even if before the sin the soul of that first human being did not yet rule a spiritual but a natural body, it ruled it as it chose. But after the sin, that is, after the sin was committed in that flesh from which sinful flesh was thereafter propagated, the rational soul is located among inferior bodies such that it does not rule its body in every way as it chooses. But if they do not accept that little ones, who have not yet committed personal sins, still have sinful flesh because they need the likeness of sinful flesh as a medicine to heal this sinful flesh when they are baptized, they do not even in that case have anything to be angry at in our words. It is clear, of course, unless I am mistaken, that the same flesh began to be born after the sin, even if it is weak, not because of sin, but by nature, for Adam was not created in that way and he did not beget anyone before the sin.

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6. See Gal 5:17.

7. See 2 Cor 5:4.

8. See Wis 9:15.

9. See 1 Cor 15:53-54.

10. Sallust, *The War against Jugurtha (Bellum Iugurthinum)* II, 3.

7. Let them, therefore, look for other things that they may correctly criticize, not only in other books that I somewhat hastily published but also in these very books of mine, *Free Will*, since I do not deny that they will find many ways in which they may benefit me. For, if those books cannot be corrected because they have already come into the hands of many people, I certainly can be corrected since I am still living. But these people, who think that this same hesitation of mine on so obscure a matter should be criticized, criticize these words of mine that I put down in so cautious a way as to endorse none of those four opinions or arguments about the origin of the soul. Against them I do not defend myself because I am correct to hesitate on this question, though I do not at all doubt that the soul is immortal, not in the way God is, who alone has immortality,<sup>11</sup> but in a certain way of its own. I do not doubt that it is a creature, not the substance of the creator, and whatever else I hold as most certain regarding its nature. But because the obscurity of this darkest question about the origin of the soul compels me to do this, let them rather offer a hand to one who admits this and who desires to know whatever the truth is. Let them teach me if they can or show me if they either have learned something by certain reason concerning this matter or have believed the perfectly clear words of God. For, if an argument is given in opposition to the authority of the divine scriptures, however clever it may be, it deceives by a likeness to the truth, for it cannot be true. Again, if the authority of the holy scriptures seems to have been raised as an objection to a perfectly clear and certain argument, one who does this does not understand and raises as an objection against the truth not the meaning of the scriptures, which he could not penetrate, but rather his own meaning, and he is opposed not to what he finds in them but to what he finds in himself as if in support of them.

8. Pay careful attention to the example that I give. Near the end of the book called *Ecclesiastes* it says, when scripture was speaking about the dissolution of a human being, which comes about through death, by which the soul is taken from the body: *And let dust return to the earth, as it was, and let the spirit return to God who gave it* (Eccl 12:7). A statement of this authority is undoubtedly certain and misleads no one by its falsity. But if anyone wants to interpret it so that from it he tries to defend the propagation of souls, because all the other souls come from that one soul that God gave to the first man, what is said there about the flesh under the term "dust" seems to support him. After all, dust and spirit in that passage are understood to be nothing but flesh and soul. And in that way it says that the soul returns to God because it comes by propagation from that soul that God gave to the first man, just as the flesh returns to the earth, since it also comes by propagation from that flesh of the first man that was made from the earth. And in that way this person might argue that from what is perfectly well known about that flesh we ought to believe what is hidden regarding the soul.

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11. See 1 Tm 6:16.

There is no ambiguity, of course, about the propagation of the flesh, but there is about the soul. Both of them, however, are set forth in this testimony as if, by a like argument, flesh and spirit are each given back to their respective sources, that is, flesh returns to the earth, as it had been, for it was taken from there when the first man was made, and the spirit returns to God who gave it when he breathed the breath of life into the face of the man whom he fashioned and man was made into a living soul.<sup>12</sup> And from then on the propagation of both body and soul proceeded from each of them.

9. Nonetheless, if it is true that God gives to individual bodies individual souls that are not propagated from that one but are created elsewhere, the words of scripture, *The spirit returns to God who gave it*, also fit this view. Only the two other opinions seem to be excluded. For, if their own souls are produced in individual human beings when they are created, it seems that scripture ought not to have said: *The spirit returns to God who gave it*, but, "To God who made it." For "he gave" makes it sound as if what could be given already existed outside the body. Next, they squeeze and stress the words, *returns to God*, saying, "How will it return to where it never was before?" For they maintain that it ought to have said: "And let it either go or make its way to God," rather than, "returns to God," if we are to believe that this spirit was never there before. So too, it is not so easy to explain how souls slip into bodies of their own accord, since it said, *God gave it*. And for this reason, as I said, these two opinions have a hard time with the words of this testimony: the one that holds that individual souls are each made in their individual bodies, and the other that holds that they sink into bodies of their own accord. But these words fit with those other two without any difficulty, whether they come by propagation from that one or are given to individual bodies after they were already created and placed in God's presence.

10. And still the defenders of the view that holds that souls are created in their individual bodies might claim that scripture said, *God gave it*, with reference to "spirit," which was used in place of "soul," just as God is correctly said to have given us eyes, ears, hands, or anything else. For he certainly had not already made these members outside the body and had them stored away in some place in order to give them when they were needed, that is, in order to add or join them to the body. Rather, he made them there in the body to which he is said to have given them. If they say this, I do not see what answer might be given to this except perhaps to produce either other testimonies or a certain argument that would refute this opinion. So too, those who think that souls flow down into bodies of their own accord interpret the words, *God gave it*, in the same sense as the words, *God handed them over to the desire of their heart* (Rom 1:24). Hence, only one expression is left where it says, *returns to God*. How could it be understood to return to where it was not previously if souls are each made in their own

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12. See Gn 2:7.



bodies? Because of that expression alone one opinion of those four runs into difficulty. But I do not think that this opinion ought to be rashly rejected on account of this one expression. For it can possibly be shown that this too could have been correctly said in some manner of speaking that holy scripture uses so that we understand that the created spirit returns to God as to its author who created it, not as to him with whom it previously existed.

11. I wrote this in order that anyone who wants to argue for and defend one of those four opinions on the soul should bring forth either such proofs from the scriptures that have been accepted as authoritative by the Church and that cannot be interpreted in another way, such as that God made man, or an argument so certain that it either cannot be contradicted or to do so would be judged on a par with insanity, such as saying that only someone living can know the truth or be deceived. For we do not need the authority of the scriptures in order to see how this is true, and common sense itself proclaims that it is true by clear evidence so that whoever contradicts it is regarded as completely out of his mind. If on this most obscure question concerning the soul anyone can produce such a proof, let him come to the aid of my ignorance, but if he cannot, let him not blame my hesitation.

12. But concerning the virginity of Holy Mary, if what I wrote does not convince you that it was possible, you have to deny everything that takes place miraculously in bodies. And if the friend who is disturbed by this does not believe it because it happened only once, ask him whether he finds no event in secular literature that happened only once and was, nonetheless, taken in their view to be not an empty myth but reliable history. Ask him, I beg you. For, if he says that nothing of the sort is found in that literature, he needs education. But if he admits that there is, the question is ended.

## Letter 144

Perhaps before 411, Augustine wrote to the people of Cirta who had been converted to the Catholic Church from the Donatist schism. Augustine tells them that their conversion is God's work, not his (paragraph 1). Even Polemon's conversion from a life of drunkenness was a gift of God. Hence, the people of Cirta ought to thank God much more for the gift they have received (paragraph 2). Augustine adds a further argument for the benefit of any in their city who may still cling to their Donatist beliefs (paragraph 3).

*To the people of Cirta, his honorable lords and his rightly commendable, dearest and most beloved brothers in every level of office, Augustine, the bishop, sends greetings.*

1. If what caused us grave sadness in your city has been removed, if the hardness of the human heart that resists the most evident and, so to speak, public truth has been driven out by the power of the same truth, if you taste the sweetness of peace, and if the love of unity does not turn away weakened eyes but enlightens and refreshes healthy ones, this is not our work but the work of God. I would not attribute this to human actions at all, not even if, when we were with you, the conversion of so great a number came about as we spoke to and exhorted you. He does this and brings it about who externally admonishes us by his ministers through the signs of things but by himself teaches us internally through the things themselves. Nor should we be moved more slowly to visit you for the reason that, whatever has been done among you that is worthy of praise, has been done not by us but by him who alone works wonders.<sup>1</sup> After all, we ought to be much quicker to run to see the works of God than our own, because, if we are at all good, we too are his work and not that of human beings. For this reason the apostle says, *Neither he who plants nor he who waters is of any importance, but only God who gives the increase* (1 Cor 3:7).

2. As you write and as we also recall from those writings, Xenocrates suddenly converted Polemon, who was not only a drunkard but who was even drunk at the time, to another way of living by a lecture on the benefit of temperance.<sup>2</sup> Although, as you wisely and truthfully understood, Xenocrates did not gain Polemon for God but only set him free from the domination of a life of dissoluteness, I would not, nonetheless, attribute even that improvement in him to the work of a human being but to that of God. For, if there are any goods of this body, which is our lowest part, such as its shape, strength, health, and anything

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1. See Ps 72:18.

2. Xenocrates (c. 396-314) was the head of the Academy after Speusippus; Polemon followed Xenocrates in the same position.

else of the sort, they come only from God, who creates and perfects nature. For how much better reason can no one else give goods of the soul! For what could the deranged human mind think that is more proud and more ungrateful than if it supposes that, though God makes a human being beautiful in the flesh, he is made chaste in the soul by a human being? This is stated in the book of Christian wisdom as follows: *For I know that no one can be continent unless God gives this, and this too belonged to wisdom, namely, to know whose gift this was* (Wis 8:21). If, then, Polemon, who was transformed from dissoluteness to continence, had known whose gift this was in order that he might worship him in piety after having cast off the superstitions of the pagans, he would have been not only continent but also truly wise and religious in a way conducive to salvation. That would have helped him not only for the moral uprightness of the present life but also for the immortality of the life to come. How much the less, then, ought I to claim for myself your conversion or that of your people, which you have just now reported to us and which was undoubtedly brought about by God, in those in whom it has really been brought about, not by my speaking or even by my presence! And so, bear this especially in mind; ponder this with piety and humility. Give thanks to God, my brothers, to God! Fear God in order that you may not fail. Love him in order that you may make progress.

3. But if human feelings still secretly hold certain people apart or if human fear falsely brings them together, those who are such should bear in mind that they do not deceive God who is their witness, nor do they escape him as their judge, for the human conscience lies open to him. But if something troubles them about the question of this unity out of concern for their salvation, let them seize for themselves the conviction, something that is perfectly just in my opinion, that they should rather believe concerning the Catholic Church, that is, the Church spread throughout the world, what the divine scriptures say and not what human tongues wickedly say. But concerning the disagreement that has arisen among human beings, of whatever sort they might be, they do not, of course, take anything away from the promises of God who said to Abraham, *In your offspring all the nations will be blessed* (Gn 26:4). This was believed when it was promised, and it is now denied when it is seen to be fulfilled. Let them meanwhile ponder only this very brief and, unless I am mistaken, invincible argument: Either the case was dealt with in an ecclesiastical court overseas, or it was not. If it was not dealt with there, the society of Christ is innocent throughout all the nations overseas, the society with which we rejoice to be in communion, and therefore they are separated from those innocent peoples by a sacrilegious schism. But if this case was dealt with there, who does not understand, who does not perceive, who does not see that they were defeated who are separated from communion with them? Let them, therefore, choose whether they wish to believe what the ecclesiastical judges decided or what the quarrelsome losers mutter. In accord with your wisdom take careful note how you can make no

sober reply to this argument, which is so brief to state and so easy to understand. And yet, the wicked Polemon is rather cured of the drunkenness of long-standing error. Pardon this letter that is perhaps longer than it is cheerful; it is, nonetheless, I think, more useful than charming, my honorable lords and rightly commendable, dearest and most beloved brothers. With regard to our arrival in your city, however, may the Lord fulfill the desire of both of us. For we cannot express in words how much we are set aflame with the ardor of love for seeing you, but we do not doubt that you believe us in your kindness.

## Letter 145

Probably in 413 or 414, Augustine replied to Anastasius, who was a member of a monastery in North Africa. Augustine tells Anastasius that he wanted to reply earlier to his letter but was occupied with many tasks (paragraph 1). He first warns Anastasius about the dangers of the allurements of the flesh and the world from which only God's grace sets one free (paragraph 2). The law teaches us and commands us, but we can only observe it through grace (paragraph 3). Augustine explains that a person does not love righteousness who avoids sin only out of the fear of punishment (paragraph 4). The love of righteousness and delight in it, not the fear of punishment, ought to bring us to live righteously (paragraph 5). Augustine urges Anastasius to cling to Christ out of love, not out of fear of punishment (paragraph 6). We need to pray for love constantly in order that we may fulfill the law (paragraph 7). Finally, Augustine mentions that he has written on this topic not on account of Anastasius but on account of others who think that the will is sufficient all by itself to fulfill the law, though he does not mention the Pelagians whom he clearly had in mind (paragraph 8).

*To his lord, the holy and lovable brother, Anastasius, Augustine sends greetings in the Lord.*

1. The honorable servants of God, our brothers, Lupicinus and Concordialis, have offered me a most reliable opportunity to greet Your Sincerity, though, even if I did not write, Your Charity would learn through them everything that goes on among us. After all, I know how much you love us in Christ since you also know how much we love you in him, and for this reason I had no doubt that you would be disappointed if you saw them without a letter from us, since you could not fail to know that they set out from us and are united to us by so close a relationship. Moreover, I also owe you an answer. For from the time I received your letter, I am not sure that I have replied before now. We have been, after all, tied up and torn apart by so many concerns that I am also not sure about this.

2. We want very much to know how you are and whether the Lord has granted you some rest, to the extent that it is possible on this earth. For, if one member is honored, all the members rejoice along with him.<sup>1</sup> And thus it very often happens that, when we think in the midst of our worries that some brothers are enjoying some rest, no matter how slight, we are refreshed in no small degree, as if we too were living more quietly and peacefully among them. And yet, when troubles are multiplied in the frailty of this life, they force us to desire eternal rest. This world is, of course, more dangerous when it is attractive than when it is troublesome, and it must be avoided more when it lures us to love it than when it teaches and forces us to scorn it. For, since everything that is in the world is the concupis-

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1. See 1 Cor 12:26.

cence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and worldly ambition,<sup>2</sup> a love for the sweetness of the earth often thrusts itself even upon those who prefer spiritual, invisible, and eternal things to such things, and it accompanies our duties with its delights. For, the better the good things to come are in relation to our love, the more violent present goods are in relation to our weakness. And would that those who know how to see these things and groan over them merited to conquer them and escape from them! But, without the grace of God, the human will in no way accomplishes this. Nor should the will be said to be free as long as it is subject to desires that conquer and bind it. For a person is a slave to him by whom he has been defeated,<sup>3</sup> and, *If the Son has set you free, says the very Son of God, then you will truly be free* (Jn 8:38).

3. And so, by teaching and commanding what cannot be fulfilled without grace, the law shows a human being his weakness so that, once proven, his weakness may seek the savior by whom the will is healed and may be able to do what it could not do when it was weak. The law, then, leads to faith; faith obtains through prayer a greater abundance of the Spirit; the Spirit pours out love; love fulfills the law. And so the law is called a schoolmaster,<sup>4</sup> under whose most menacing severity one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.<sup>5</sup> But how will they call upon him in whom they have not believed?<sup>6</sup> Hence, so that the letter without the spirit may not kill, the life-giving Spirit is given to those who believe and call upon him. But *the love of God is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us* (Rom 5:5), in order that the words of the same apostle may be realized: *Love is the fulfillment of the law* (Rom 13:10). In that way the law is good for one who uses it in a legitimate way.<sup>7</sup> But one uses it in a legitimate way who understands why it was given and takes refuge in the grace that sets one free. Anyone ungrateful to this grace, by which the sinner is made righteous, who trusts in his own strength for the fulfillment of the law, not knowing the righteousness of God and wanting to establish his own, is not subject to the righteousness of God.<sup>8</sup> And in this way the law becomes for him not a help toward his deliverance but a chain binding him to sin. It is not that the law is evil but that, as scripture says, *sin produced death through what is good* (Rom 7:13). For because of the commandment he sins more seriously who knows through the commandment how evil the sin is that he commits.

4. In vain, however, does he suppose that he conquers sin who refrains from sin out of fear of punishment, because, even if he does not carry out externally

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2. See 1 Jn 2:17.

3. See 2 Pt 2:9.

4. See Gal 3:24.

5. See J1 2:32.

6. See Rom 10:14.

7. See 1 Tm 1:8.

8. See Rom 10:3.

the act of his evil desire, the evil desire is, nonetheless, an enemy within. And who is found innocent in God's eyes if he wills to do what is forbidden, if you would only remove what he fears? And for this reason he is guilty in the will itself if he wills to do what is not permissible to do but does not do it because he cannot do it with impunity. For, insofar as it is up to him, he would prefer that there not be the justice that forbids and punishes sins. And surely, if he would prefer that justice not exist, who would have any doubt that he would destroy it if he could? And so, how is he just, if he is such an enemy of justice that, if he were given the power, he would destroy its commandments so that he would not have to endure its threats and punishments? He is, then, an enemy of justice if he does not sin out of fear of punishment, but its friend if he does not sin out of love for it. For, then, he will truly fear to sin. For one who fears hell does not fear to sin but to burn. But he fears to sin who hates the sin itself like hell. This is the pure fear of the Lord that remains forever and ever.<sup>9</sup> For that fear of punishment involves torment and is not present in love, and perfect love casts it out.<sup>10</sup>

5. Now each person hates sin to the extent that he loves righteousness, and this will not be possible when the law causes terror through its letter but when the Spirit heals through grace. Then there comes about what the apostle teaches: *I speak in human terms on account of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you offered your members to serve impurity and greater and greater iniquity, so now offer your members to serve righteousness leading to sanctification* (Rom 6:19). For what does, "Just as that, so this too," mean but: Just as no fear was forcing you to sin, but the desire for sin and its pleasure, so let not the fear of punishment press you to live justly, but let the delight in righteousness and the love of it lead you to this? And, as I see it, this is to be sure not yet perfect righteousness, but in a sense grown-up righteousness. After all, he would have uselessly begun with, *I speak to you in human terms because of your weakness*, unless he ought to have said something more, if they were already able to bear it. We, of course, owe more service to righteousness than human beings usually offer to sin. For the punishment of the body calls us back from carrying out the sin, even if it does not call us back from willing it. Nor is it easy to find anyone who would publicly commit a sin in order to derive forbidden and impure pleasure from it, if it were certain that the torments of punishment would immediately follow. But we should love righteousness in such a way that even punishments of the body ought not to hold us back from acts of righteousness, and even in the hands of cruel enemies our works ought to shine forth in the eyes of human beings so that those who find them pleasing may glorify our Father who is in heaven.<sup>11</sup>

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9. See Ps 19:10.

10. See 1 Jn 4:18.

11. See Mt 5:16.

6. This is the reason why that mightiest lover of righteousness cries out: *Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, distress, persecution, hunger, nakedness, peril, or the sword? Scripture says, "For your sake we are put to death every day; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter." But in all these we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am certain that neither death nor life, neither an angel nor a principality, neither the present nor the future, neither powers nor height nor depth nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:35-39 with Ps 43:22).* See how the apostle does not ask in general: "Who will separate us from Christ?" Rather, in order to show how we should cling to Christ, he asks, *Who will separate us from the love of Christ?* Let us, then, cling to Christ out of love, not out of fear of punishment. Then, having mentioned those things that seem to involve violence but still do not have the power to separate us from Christ, he concludes by calling the same love that he had said was Christ's the love of God. And what does *from the love of Christ* mean but: from the love of righteousness? Of him the apostle, of course, said, *He became for us wisdom from God and righteousness, holiness and redemption, in order that, as scripture says, he who boasts may boast in the Lord (1 Cor 1:30-31 with Jer 9:24).* Just as, then, he is most unjust who is not deterred even by bodily punishments from impure acts of filthy pleasure, so he is most just who is not called back from holy acts of most glorious love by the terror of bodily punishments.

7. This *love of God*—and we must hold this constantly in our thoughts—is *poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom 5:5)* in order that *he who boasts may boast in the Lord (1 Cor 1:31).* When, therefore, we feel that we are poor and needy with respect to this love by which the law is fulfilled, we ought not to demand his riches on the basis of our poverty but to ask, to seek, and to knock in prayer so that he in whom is the fountain of life may grant that we are inebriated by the richness of his house and may drink from the torrent of his pleasure.<sup>12</sup> Flooded and refreshed by it, we will not only not be swallowed up by sadness but will even glory in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces patience, that patience produces character, that character produces hope, but that hope is not disappointed,<sup>13</sup> not because we can do this by ourselves but because *the love of God is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom 5:5).*

8. It has been a delight to speak with you about these matters, at least by letter, and I do not write these things on account of you, who do not have proud thoughts but think with the humble,<sup>14</sup> but on account of certain people who claim

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12. See Ps 36:9.

13. See Rom 5:4.

14. See Rom 2:16.



too much for the human will, for they think that, given the law, the will can be sufficient by itself to fulfill it, without the help of any grace of a holy inspiration beyond the teaching of the law.<sup>15</sup> By the arguments of these people, the wretched and needy weakness of human beings is persuaded that we ought not even to pray that we may not enter into temptation. It is not that they dare to say this openly, but this certainly follows from their position, whether they like it or not. For why are we told, *Watch and pray so that you do not enter into temptation* (Mt 26:41)? Why in accord with this exhortation did he, when he taught us to pray, command that we say: *Bring us not into temptation* (Mt 6:13), if we do not succeed in doing this by the help of divine grace but it lies entirely in the choice of the human will? What more shall I say? Greet the brothers who are with you, and pray for us that we may be healthy in accord with that good health of which he said, *It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but those who are ill. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners* (Mt 9:12-13). Pray, then, for us that we may be righteous, something that a human being cannot be unless he knows and wills it, and one who wills it completely will be so immediately. But this does not lie in a man's power unless he is healed by the grace of the Spirit and helped in order to be able to do this.

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15. Augustine alludes to the followers of Pelagius and Caelestius.

## Letter 146

In 410 Augustine wrote to Pelagius, a lay ascetic who had come to Africa after the fall of Rome. Later, when on trial for heresy at the Council of Diospolis in 415, Pelagius used this letter as testimony to his orthodoxy. Augustine commented on this letter in *The Deeds of Pelagius* 26, 51, obviously struggling to give it a meaning that is less favorable to Pelagius than a superficial reading of it might yield. His comments can serve as an Augustinian introduction to his own letter.

“I not only held myself back from praising him; I even admonished him to hold sound doctrines, as much as I could, without raising any question about the grace of God. I, of course, addressed him as ‘lord’ in the salutation of the letter, for in accord with the practice in letter-writing we generally write that way even to certain people who are not Christians. Nor did I do this insincerely, for in some sense we have an obligation freely to be of service to all that they may attain salvation in Christ. I addressed him as ‘beloved,’ and I repeat it now. And if he is angry at me, I will still say it, since, if I do not maintain my love for him despite his anger, I will do harm to myself instead. I spoke of him as someone I longed for very much, because I strongly desired to converse with him face to face. After all, I had already heard that, as soon as there was some mention made of it, he tried in open argument to oppose the grace by which we are justified. Moreover, the shortness of my letter indicates that. I thanked him for having brought me joy with his letter by assuring me of his health and that of his friends. After all, we should want those people also to enjoy good bodily health whom we want to have the correct faith. Then I expressed my hope that the Lord would reward him not with goods pertaining to bodily health but rather with those which he thought or perhaps still thinks are found only in the choice of the will and in our own power. At the same time and for the same reason I wished him eternal life. Then, because in his letter which I was answering he had extensively and kindly praised certain goods of that sort in me, I also asked him to pray for me so that the Lord might make me the sort of person that he already believed me to be. In that way I meant to admonish him—quite contrary to his views—that the very righteousness which he thought praiseworthy in me *does not depend on the one who wills or runs, but on God who shows mercy* (Rom 9:16). This is everything that my short letter contains, and that was the intention with which I dictated it.”

*To Pelagius, my beloved lord and brother for whom I long very much, Augustine sends greetings in the Lord.*

I am very grateful that you were so kind as to bring me joy by your letter and assure me of your good health. May the Lord reward you, my beloved lord and brother for whom I long very much, with the good things by which you may be good forever and live eternally with the eternal God. Though I do not find in myself the grounds for that praise for me that your kind letter contains, I cannot fail to be grateful for your goodwill toward the slight goodness I have. At the same time I admonish you rather to pray for me so that the Lord might make me the sort of person you think me already to be.

## Letter 147

In 413 or 414 Augustine wrote to Paulina, a Catholic laywoman in Africa, the wife of Armentarius. Augustine had written Letter 127 to this couple. Here he writes a book-length letter in answer to Paulina's questions about whether God can be seen with the eyes of the flesh. In the *Revisions* he speaks of this and the following letter:

"I wrote a book on *On Seeing God* in which, regarding the spiritual body that will exist at the resurrection of the saints, I postponed a more careful examination of whether or how God, who is a spirit, might be seen even by such a body. But I think that I explained that question sufficiently in the last, that is, in the twenty second book of *The City of God*. I also discovered in a manuscript of ours in which this book is found a memorandum I made on this question for Fortunatian, the bishop of Sicca, that in the list of my works is listed neither among the books nor among the letters. This book begins as follows: 'Mindful of the debt.' But that memorandum begins, 'As I asked when present'" (*Revisions* II, 41).

Augustine begins by noting that for answering such a question, thought and prayer do more good than reading and listening, but words still have a role to play in dealing with so important a question as the vision of God (paragraph 1). He asks Paulina to lift up the spirit of her mind to listen to what he says, though not to believe anything just because he says it (paragraph 2). He illustrates the difference between believing and seeing, both by the eyes of the body and by the eyes of the mind (paragraphs 3 and 4). He also distinguishes between believing things on human authority or divine authority (paragraph 5). He explains that faith involves a kind of vision, but that believing is not simply seeing with the mind (paragraph 6). We believe things that are not present to our senses if the testimony given to them seems suitable, but we see things that are present either to the senses or to the mind (paragraph 7). Our knowledge consists of what we see and of what we believe, but we ourselves are witnesses to what we see, while for what we believe, others are witnesses (paragraph 8). Augustine distinguishes what we see and what we believe when we believe that Christ rose from the dead (paragraph 9). What we believe about his resurrection is not present to our sight, though our own faith is seen by the vision of the mind (paragraph 10). Another's faith, however, can be only a matter of belief for me (paragraph 11).

Having drawn the above distinctions, Augustine comes to the vision of God, of which he is certain because of the clear statements in scripture that we will see God (paragraph 12). There are other scriptural statements, however, that no one has ever seen God or can see God, though the scriptures also testify that many people have seen God (paragraphs 13 and 14). Augustine considers whether the devil and the wicked see God and also considers Christ's statement that one who sees him sees the Father (paragraphs 15 and 16).

To solve the difficult question about the vision of God, Augustine quotes a long passage from Ambrose's *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, on which he

comments for much of the rest of the letter (paragraphs 17 and 18). Augustine first points out how skillfully Ambrose rejected the heresies of Photinus and of the Arians (paragraph 19). Then he deals with Moses' asking God, with whom he was speaking face to face, that God would show himself to Moses. God was seen by Moses in a created form that God had chosen for this purpose, but not in his nature that is invisible (paragraph 20). Augustine distinguishes seeing from comprehending (paragraph 21) and distinguishes the way in which God was seen by the patriarchs and the way he will be seen by the blessed in heaven (paragraph 22). In this life God appeared to those he wanted in the form he wanted, but in the next life the clean of heart will see him as he is (paragraphs 23 and 24). The devil and the wicked, on the other hand, will not see God because they will not be worthy (paragraph 25).

Continuing his explanation of Ambrose's words, Augustine shows that Ambrose held that God will not in the next life be seen in place or with bodily eyes but by the clean heart with the vision of the mind (paragraphs 26 to 28). Augustine explains Ambrose's statement that not all the apostles saw Christ and shows why he implied that some apostles did see him (paragraphs 29 and 30). Augustine holds that Moses and Paul were taken up to see the very substance of God before death by having their mind withdrawn from this present life (paragraph 31) and explains why Moses and Paul merited so great a vision (paragraph 32).

Ambrose taught that those who knew the breadth, length, height, and depth of Christ's love saw Christ and the Father (paragraph 33). Augustine goes on to explain the meaning of these four dimensions of Christ's love and argues that this vision of Christ is spiritual, not bodily, and not the contemplation in which we will see God as he is (paragraphs 34 and 35). Augustine warns against interpreting Ambrose's words in the sense that we will become what God is (paragraph 36) and sums up what he has so far said about our seeing God (paragraph 37) and about what we see and what we believe and about the incorporeal images of bodily things (paragraph 38). Augustine distinguishes between the faith we owe to the scriptures and the faith we owe to another human being and finds Ambrose's claim that God cannot be seen by bodily eyes both in accord with the scriptures and with his own belief (paragraph 39).

Augustine fends off the suggestion that we will see God with a clean heart, but in place and with bodily eyes (paragraph 40). He points out the superiority of the interior eyes of the mind to the exterior eyes of the body (paragraph 41) and shows that we do not see in space those things we see with the eyes of the mind (paragraph 42). He further distinguishes the spiritual vision of non-bodily images of bodies from the mind's vision of non-bodily realities such as love (paragraph 43). If we do not see love with bodily eyes or in place, how much less is God seen in place and with bodily eyes (paragraph 44). Since what is highest in us, namely, our mind, is not visible to the eyes of the body, God who is higher than our mind cannot be visible to the eyes of the body (paragraph 45). Augustine urges Paulina to believe the testimonies of scripture if she still does not understand his arguments that God is not seen and will not be seen by bodily eyes (paragraph 46). While his nature remains immutable and hidden, in this life God reveals himself to whom he wants in whatever form he wants (paragraph 47). But

the vision of God as he is in himself is the reward of the clean of heart in the next life (paragraph 48).

Augustine turns to the question of our spiritual body in the resurrection. He flatly rejects the view of those who hold that God is a body but finds somewhat more tolerable the view of others who think that our body will be changed into a spirit (paragraph 49). The whole question centers upon transformation of our body from natural to spiritual. But the claim that seeing belongs only to bodies is clearly contrary to scripture (paragraph 50). The transformation of our body from natural to spiritual does not entail that our body ceases to be a body (paragraph 51).

Augustine urges Paulina to hold with him the view of Ambrose, which is fully in accord with scripture (paragraph 52). Furthermore, Jerome is in agreement with Ambrose (paragraph 53). Though the authority of Ambrose and Jerome is not comparable to that of the canonical scripture, the authority of such learned commentators on scripture should not be rashly rejected. Finally, Augustine disposes of an argument that bodily eyes will have nothing to see if they do not see God (paragraph 54).

### A Book on Seeing God

1. 1. Mindful of the debt that I incurred because of your request and my promise, Paulina, pious handmaid of God, I ought also not to have been negligent in its payment. For, since you asked that I write to you something fulsome and lengthy with regard to whether the invisible God can be seen by bodily eyes, I could not refuse you for fear that I would offend your holy zeal. But I put off what I promised either on account of my other occupations or because you demanded of me something about which it was necessary to think a bit longer. Since the question was so delicate that it became more difficult as I considered not so much what one should hold or say about this as how one should persuade those who have other ideas, I thought that I must finally put an end to my delay in the hope that God's help will be with me more in my writing than in my delaying. Hence, it seems to me first of all that on this question one's manner of life is more important than one's manner of speaking. For those who have learned from the Lord Jesus Christ to be meek and humble of heart<sup>1</sup> make more progress by thinking and praying than by reading and hearing. Words do not, nonetheless, for this reason surrender their role, but when the one who plants and waters<sup>2</sup> has performed his function, he leaves the rest to the one who gives the increase. He, after all, also created the one who plants and waters.

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1. See Mt 11:29.

2. See 1 Cor 3:7.

2. Receive, then, the words of understanding in accord with the interior self. For that self is renewed from day to day, even while this exterior self is destroyed<sup>3</sup> by the rigors of abstinence or by some ill health or by any other happening or at least by the approach of old age, which is inevitable even for those who have a long life in a healthy body. Lift up, then, the spirit of your mind, which is renewed in the knowledge of God according to the image of him who created it,<sup>4</sup> where Christ dwells in you through faith,<sup>5</sup> where there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor freeman, neither male nor female,<sup>6</sup> where you will not die when you begin to be released from the body, because you did not lose strength there, though you are weighed down with years. Once you are raised up in your interior self, pay attention and see what I am saying. I do not want you to follow my authority so that you think that it is necessary for you to believe something because I said it. Rather, either believe the canonical scriptures if there is something that you do not as yet see is true, or believe the truth who teaches interiorly in order that you may see this clearly.

3. I shall by way of example say something that will better prepare you for these topics and for the topic on which the task of discussion has been set before us in this work. We believe that God is seen, not because we see him either through the eyes of the body, as we see this sun, or by the gaze of the mind, as each of us sees ourselves living, willing, seeking, knowing, and not knowing. Having read these things in this letter, you therefore recall that you certainly saw the sun through the eyes of the body; you can also see it at this very moment if it is the right time or if you are in a place where the sky is open before your eyes in the direction for you to see the sun. But for seeing those things that I said are seen by the mind, that is, that you are living, that you want to see God, that you are seeking this, that you know that you are living, willing, and seeking, though you do not know how God is seen—for seeing all these things, I say, you do not use the eyes of the body, nor do you perceive or seek a distance in space through which your gaze is stretched out in order to come to see those things. In that way you see your life, will, seeking, knowledge, and ignorance, for you should not place no value on the very seeing by which you see that you do not know. In that way, I repeat, you see all these things so that you see them in yourself, have them within yourself, and see them without any outlines of figures or brightness of colors more clearly and more certainly to the extent that you see them more simply and interiorly. Since, therefore, we do not see God with the eyes of the body, as we see either heavenly or earthly bodies, or with the gaze of the mind, as we see those things some of which I mentioned above, things that you see most certainly within yourself, why do we believe that he is seen if not because we

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3. See 2 Cor 4:16.

4. See Col 3:10.

5. See Eph 3:17.

6. See Gal 3:28.

place our faith in the scripture where we read, *Blessed are the clean of heart because they will see God* (Mt 5:8), and any other passages that were written down by divine authority to this effect? For we consider it wrong not to believe this authority, whereas we have no doubt that to believe it is a matter of piety.

4. Therefore, hold on to this distinction. Accordingly, if in the course of the discussion I call your attention to something that you see with the eyes of the flesh or that you perceive or recall that you have perceived with any other sense, as we perceive colors, sounds, smells, tastes, and warmth or anything else we perceive through the body by seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching, or if I call your attention to something that you see with the gaze of the mind, as you see your life, willing, thought, memory, understanding, knowledge, faith, and anything else you see by the mind and do not doubt that it is true, not merely by believing, but by clearly seeing, you should judge that I have clearly shown this. But if I do not show you something so that you hold it as seen and perceived by a sense of the body or of the mind, and if I nonetheless say something that must be either true or false but does not seem to fall into either of those two kinds, it remains for you only to believe or not to believe it. But if it is supported by the clear authority of those divine scriptures, namely, those that are called “canonical” in the Church, it must be believed without any doubt. But you may believe or not believe other witnesses or testimonies by which you might be persuaded to believe something to the extent that you consider that they have or do not have sufficient weight to produce faith.

5. For, if we did not believe any of those things that we did not see, that is, that we did not perceive directly at the present moment by either the mind or the body and that we did not learn from the holy scriptures either by reading or by hearing, how would we know that there are cities where we never were or that Rome was founded by Romulus or—to speak of more recent events—that Constantinople was founded by Constantine? How, finally, would we know the mothers who bore us and the fathers, grandfathers, and ancestors who begot us? Of course we know very many such things, yet we have not learned them either as present to any sense, like the sun or like the will of our mind, or by the authority of the canonical writings, as we know that Adam was the first human being or that Christ was born in the flesh, suffered, and rose. Rather, we have learned these things from the reports of others about whose testimony we have thought that we should have no doubt, at least in this sort of matter. For, if in these matters we make a mistake somewhere by believing that something is true that is not or that something is not true that is, we judge that there is no danger, if it is not against that faith by which piety is informed. This introduction of mine does not yet examine the question you posed, but it prepares you and others who will read these ideas as to what sort of judge you ought to be of my writings or of those of any others. In that way you will not either suppose that you know something that you do not know or rashly believe something that you have not perceived either by the senses of the body or by the gaze of the mind in a direct vision of the very

thing to be known or something that you have not learned must be believed by the authority of the canonical scriptures, even if it was not present to the senses of either the mind or the body.

6. Have we, then, come to the point? Or does the reader still need to be instructed? For some think that what we call "believing," when something true is believed, is merely to see it with the mind. But if that is so, our introduction is mistaken in which we made the following distinctions. That is, it is one thing to sense something through the body, like the sun in the sky or a mountain, a tree, or any body on the earth, and it is something else to sense a thing no less evident by the look of the mind, as we see our will interiorly when we will something or our thought when we think or our memory when we recall something or anything of the sort that we see in the mind without the body. But it is still something else to believe something that is neither present nor recalled to have been present to the sight of the body or the mind, such as that Adam was created without parents and that Christ was born of a virgin, suffered, and rose. For these things were also done in a bodily way and could have been seen by the body if we were present at that time, but they are not now present as this sunlight is present, which is seen by the eyes, or as the will is present, by which we now will something and which is seen by the mind. But since this distinction is not erroneous, that introduction certainly did not include enough since it did not draw a distinction between believing and seeing something present with the mind in language sufficiently clear that they were not thought to be absolutely one and the same thing.

2. 7. What then shall we say? Is it enough that we say that there is this difference between seeing and believing, namely, that present things are seen while absent ones are believed? This is perhaps quite enough if we understand that those things are in this passage said to be present that are available (*praesto*) to the senses of the mind or the body for they are called "present" because the word is derived from this. For in that way I see this sunlight by the sense of the body, and in that way I clearly see my will as well, because it is available to the sense of my mind and is present to me interiorly. But if someone whose lips and voice are present to me reveals his will to me, because the will that he reveals to me is, nonetheless, hidden from the sense of my body and of my mind, I believe; I do not see. Or, if I think he is lying, I do not believe, even if things are perhaps as he says. We believe those things, then, that are not present to our senses if the testimony that is offered to them seems suitable, but we see those things which are available (*praesto*), and for this reason they are called present to the senses of either the mind or the body. For, though there are five senses of the body, the senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching, sight is, of course, mainly attributed to the eyes, though we use this word with regard to the other senses as well. We do not, after all, merely say, "See how bright it is," but also, "See how it sounds," "See how it smells," "See how it tastes," and "See how hot it is." Nor should you understand that, because I said that things not present to



our senses are believed, those things that we once saw and retain and are certain that we did see are to be counted among those things that are believed, though they are not at that moment present to us when they are recalled by us. For they are not counted among things believed but among things seen, and they are for this reason known, not because we had faith in others as witnesses but because without any doubt we recall and know that we have seen them.

3, 8. Our knowledge, then, is made up of both things seen and things believed. But in these things that we see or have seen we ourselves are the witnesses, while in those things that we believe we are moved to belief by other witnesses, when we are given signs of those things that we neither recall that we have seen nor see now, whether the signs are in spoken words or writing or any documents because of which we believe what we do not see when we see those signs. But it is not without reason that we say that we know not only those things that we have seen or see, but also those that we believe when we have been moved by testimonies and witnesses suitable for any matter. Moreover, if we are not inappropriately said to know even what we believe as most certain, it turns out as a result that we are said to see with the mind even those things that are correctly believed, though they are not present to our senses. Knowledge, of course, is attributed to the mind if it retains something perceived and known, whether through the senses of the body or through the mind itself. And faith is, of course, seen by the mind itself, though by faith we believe what we do not see. For this reason the apostle Peter also says, *You believe in him whom you do not now see* (1 Pt 1:8), and the Lord himself says, *Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed* (Jn 20:29).

9. When, therefore, we say to someone, "Believe that Christ has risen," notice what he sees if he believes, and notice what he believes, and distinguish the two. He sees a human being whose voice he hears, and the voice is counted among the bodily things that are seen in terms of what we said above. There are these two things: the witness and the testimony, one of which pertains to the eyes and the other to the ears. But the man may perhaps confirm this witness by the authority of other testimonies, that is, of the divine scriptures or of any others by which he is moved to belief. The scriptures pertain to those things that are seen by the body, by the eyes if he read them or by the ears if he heard them, but he sees by the mind whatever he understands is signified by the shapes of the letters or by their sounds. He sees his own faith because of which he replies without hesitation that he believes. He sees his thought by which he thinks of the good that his believing can do for him. He sees his will by which he has drawn close to accepting religion. He also sees some image of the resurrection, which was produced in his mind and without which he cannot understand whatever is said to have been done in a bodily way, whether one believes or does not believe.

4. But, I think, you distinguish how he sees his faith by which he believes and how he sees that image of the resurrection produced in his mind, which he sees if he hears this, even if he does not believe it.

10. He sees, therefore, all these things, in part by the body, in part by the mind; he does not see but he believes both the will of the person, from whom he hears these words in order that he might believe them, and the resurrection of Christ. And yet he is said to see it by a certain look of the mind more in accord with his belief in testimonies than because of the presence of the things themselves. For those things that he sees are present to the senses of either the mind or the body, but those things that he believes are absent from the senses of the mind and the body, although the will of the one from whom he hears in order that he might believe is not past but remains in the speaker, and the speaker sees it in himself. But the hearer does not see it but believes. The resurrection of Christ, however, is past, and even those people who were there at that time did not see it. For those who saw Christ living had seen him dying, yet they did not see the resurrection itself when it happened, but they believed it with complete certainty because they saw and touched the one who they had known was dead. We believe the whole set of events, both that he rose and that he was at that time seen and touched by human beings and that he now lives in the heavens and will no longer die and death will no more have dominion over him.<sup>7</sup> The reality, however, is not present either to the senses of our body, as this sky and earth are present, or to the vision of our mind, as the faith is present by which we believe.

11. But you have, I think, sufficiently recognized from this introduction of mine what it is to see either with the mind or with the body and how believing differs from them. What the mind does is, of course, seen by the mind since our faith is evident to our mind. But what we believe by that faith is, nonetheless, absent both from the gaze of our body, as the body in which Christ rose is absent, and from the gaze of the mind of someone else, as your faith is absent from the gaze of my mind. And yet I believe it is in you, though I do not see it with the body, something you cannot do either, or with the mind, something you can do, just as I can see my faith, which you cannot see. For no one knows what goes on in a human being except the spirit of the human being who is in him,<sup>8</sup> until the Lord comes who will illumine what is hidden in darkness and will reveal the thoughts of the heart.<sup>9</sup> Then each will see not only his own thoughts but those of others. For in accord with this, that is, in accord with what we see in ourselves, the apostle said that no one knows what goes on in a human being except the spirit of the human being who is in him. But in accord with what we believe yet do not see, we know that many are believers, as many know that we are.

5. 12. If these ideas, then, are distinct, let us come to the point. We know that God can be seen because scripture says, *Blessed are the clean of heart because they shall see God* (Mt 5:8). Or ought I not to have said, "We know," but, "We

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7. See Rom 6:9.

8. See 1 Cor 2:11.

9. See 1 Cor 4:5.

believe”? For we have never seen God with the body, as we have seen this sunlight, nor with the mind, as we have seen in ourselves the very faith by which we believe that, but we have no doubt that it is true, only because it is recorded in that scripture which we believe. The apostle John, nonetheless, said something of the sort; he said, *We know that, when he shall appear, we will be like him, because we shall see him as he is* (1 Jn 3:2). See, he said that he knew something that had not yet come about and that he had not known by seeing but by believing. And so we were correct to say, “We know that God can be seen,” though we have not seen him, but we have believed the authority of God contained in the holy books.

13. Why, then, does that same authority say, *No one has ever seen God* (Jn 1:18)? Is the answer perhaps that the former testimonies are concerned with seeing God in the future, not with having seen God? For it said that they *shall see God* and not that we have seen, but that *we shall see him as he is*. Hence, *no one has ever seen God* is not opposed to these statements. For those who with a clean heart have wanted to be children of God will see him whom they have not seen. What, then, does it mean, *I saw God face to face, and my soul was saved* (Gn 32:30)? Is this too not opposed to what was said, *No one has ever seen God*? And there are those words that were written concerning Moses, namely, that he *was speaking with God face to face, as one speaks to his friend* (Ex 33:11), and there is what the prophet Isaiah said in speaking of himself, *I saw the Lord of hosts sitting upon a throne* (Is 6:1), and any other similar testimonies that can be produced from the same authority. How are they not opposed to that statement that says, *No one has ever seen God*? And yet, the gospel itself can also be thought to be in opposition to itself, for how is the statement in it, *He who sees me sees the Father* (Jn 14:9), true if *no one has ever seen God*? How is it true that *their angels always see the face of my Father* (Mt 18:10) if *no one has ever seen God*?

14. By what rule of interpretation shall we prove that these statements that seem opposed and in conflict are not opposed and in conflict? For it is in no way possible that this authority of the scriptures is not truthful. We might say that in the statement, *No one has ever seen God*, we are to understand only human beings, just as in the other statement, *No one knows what goes on in a human being except the spirit of the human being who is in him* (1 Cor 2:11)—no one knows, but no one, surely, from among human beings. After all, this cannot be taken to refer to God, since scripture says of Christ that he had no need that anyone bear witness to him concerning a human being, for he knew what was in a human being.<sup>10</sup> For the apostle said in explaining this more fully, *Whom no human being has seen or can see* (1 Tm 6:16). If, then, *No one has ever seen God*

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10. See Jn 2:25.

was said as if to say, "No human being," this question will be seen to have been resolved to the extent that it is not opposed to this statement that the Lord made, *Their angels always see the face of my Father*. In that way we may believe that the angels see God whom *no one has ever seen*, that is, no human being. How, then, did Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job, Moses, Micaiah, Isaiah,<sup>11</sup> and any others see God, about whom scripture, which is completely truthful, testifies that they have seen God if no human being has seen or can see God?

15. And yet there are some who want to prove that even the wicked will see God, and they think that God was seen even by the devil himself. For they interpret in that sense what is recorded in the Book of Job, namely, that with his angels the devil too entered into the sight of God.<sup>12</sup> As a result, the meaning of that other statement comes into question: *Blessed are the clean of heart because they shall see God* (Mt 5:8), as well as: *With everyone pursue the peace and holiness without which no one will be able to see God* (Heb 12:14). For I am greatly surprised if those who think that the wicked will see God and that God was seen by the devils will go so far as to claim that the devils are clean of heart and pursue peace and holiness with everyone.

16. After all, the words of the Lord, *He who has seen me has also seen the Father* (Jn 14:9), can, if they are considered with a little more attention, be seen as not opposed to the statement, *No one has ever seen God* (Jn 1:18). For he did not say, "Because you have seen me, you have also seen the Father," but by saying, *He who has seen me has also seen the Father*, he wanted to reveal the unity of the substance of the Father and the Son so that they would not be thought to be unlike each other in any way. And for this reason, because it is true that *he who has seen me has also seen the Father*, it is clear that, because *no one has ever seen God*, no one should be thought to have seen either the Father or the Son insofar as the Son is God and one God with the Father. For, insofar as he is man, he was, of course, *seen on the earth and lived with human beings* (Bar 3:38).

6. 17. But there is a big question as to how it is no contradiction that so many men of old saw God if *no one has ever seen God* (Jn 1:18), the God whom *no human being has seen or can see* (1 Tm 6:16). You see how difficult a question you have raised for me. You wanted me to write on it something detailed and lengthy on account of my short letter, which you thought should be explained with greater detail and fullness. Will you, then, pay attention to what I have meanwhile found that the outstanding commentators on the divine scriptures held on the vision of God in case they may perhaps satisfy your desire, although you perhaps already know them? Pay attention, then, to these few passages, if you please. When blessed Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, was explaining the gospel, he came to that passage where the angel appeared in the temple to the

11. See Gn 18:1; Gn 26:2; Gn 32:30; Jb 38:1 and 42:9; Ex 33:11; 1 Kgs 22:19; and Is 6:1.

12. See Jb 1:6 and 2:1.

priest Zechariah; see how many important ideas he also expressed on this occasion concerning the vision of God.

18. He said, "Not without reason is the angel seen in the temple<sup>13</sup> because the coming of the true priest was then being announced and the heavenly sacrifice was being prepared at which the angels would minister. And it is correctly said that he appeared to the man who suddenly saw him. The divine scripture often maintains, especially concerning either the angels or God, that something that cannot be foreseen is said to appear. Thus you have: *God appeared to Abraham at the oak of Mambre* (Gn 18:1). For he whose presence was not foreseen but is suddenly made visible is said to appear. After all, sensible objects and God are not seen in a similar manner. God's being seen lies in his will; it pertains to his nature not to be seen and to his will to be seen. For, if he does not will to be seen, he is not seen; if he wills to be, he is. God, after all, appeared to Abraham because he willed to; he did not appear to others because he did not will to. Stephen saw the heavens open when he was being stoned by the people, and he also saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God,<sup>14</sup> but the people did not see him. Isaiah saw the Lord of hosts,<sup>15</sup> but no one else saw him because he appeared to whom he chose to appear. And why are we speaking about human beings when we also read with reference to the heavenly virtues and powers that *no one has ever seen God*? And he added what surpasses the heavenly powers: *The only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father has himself made him known* (Jn 1:18). If no one has ever seen God the Father, it is either necessary to concede that the Son was seen in the Old Testament—and let the heretics cease to assign him a beginning with the Virgin since he was seen before he was born of the Virgin—or at least it cannot be denied that the Father or the Son or surely the Holy Spirit, if there can be a vision of the Holy Spirit, is seen in that form which was chosen by their will and not that which was fashioned from their nature. For we accept that the Spirit was also seen in the dove.<sup>16</sup> And so, *no one has ever seen God* because no one has seen that fullness of divinity that dwells in God;<sup>17</sup> no one has grasped it with the mind or eyes. For *has seen* refers to both of these. Then, when scripture adds, *The only-begotten Son has himself made him known*, it indicates a vision more of minds than of eyes. For a form is seen, but a power is made known. The former is grasped by the eyes, the latter by the mind. But what shall I say about the Trinity? One of the seraphim appeared when he willed, and Isaiah alone heard his voice.<sup>18</sup> The angel appeared and is now present, but is not seen. For it is not in our power to see him, but in his power to appear. And yet, though we do not have the power

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13. See Lk 1:11.

14. See Acts 7:55.

15. See Is 6:1, 5.

16. See Mt 3:16.

17. See Col 2:9.

18. See Is 6:6-7.

to see him, there is the grace to merit that we may be able to see him. And thus, one who had grace merited this power, but we do not merit this power because we do not have the grace of seeing God. And why is it surprising if in the present age the Lord is seen only when he wills to be seen? Even in the resurrection it is not easy to see God except for those who are clean of heart, and for this reason, *Blessed are the clean of heart because they shall see God* (Mt 5:8). How many others the Lord declared blessed, and yet he did not promise these the ability to see God! If, then, those who are clean of heart will see God, the others, of course, will not see him. After all, the unworthy will not see God, nor can someone see God who has not wanted to see God. Nor is God seen in a location but by a clean heart. God is not sought by bodily eyes, nor enveloped by sight, nor held by touch, nor heard by words, nor perceived by his walk. And when he is thought not to be there, he is seen, and he is not seen when he is there. Finally, not all the apostles saw Christ, and for this reason he said, *I have been with you for so long a time, and have you still not known me?* (Jn 14:9). For one who has known *what is the breadth, length, height, and depth and the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge* (Eph 3:18-19) has also seen Christ, has also seen the Father.<sup>19</sup> For we no longer know Christ in terms of the flesh but in terms of the spirit.<sup>20</sup> Christ the Lord is, after all, spirit before our eyes;<sup>21</sup> he deigns by his mercy to fill us with all the fullness of God<sup>22</sup> in order that he can be seen by us.<sup>23</sup>

7. 19. If you understand these words, what more is left to ask of me, since that question that seemed difficult has now been resolved? We have, of course, distinguished between the way in which scripture said, *No one has ever seen God*, and the way in which the righteous of old saw God. The first statement was made because God is invisible. But whoever saw God saw God because he appeared to whom he willed, when he willed, and in that form his will chose, while his nature remained hidden. For if, when the patriarchs saw God, his nature appeared to them although if he had not willed this it would, of course, not have appeared, how is it that *no one has ever seen God*, when his very nature was seen by so many patriarchs when he willed? But if one says that the Son was seen by the Patriarchs so that one understands that *no one has ever seen God* was said with reference to God the Father Ambrose did not, of course, lose the chance to refute by this certain heretics, that is, the Photinians,<sup>24</sup> who assign a beginning to

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19. See Jn 14:9.

20. See 2 Cor 5:16.

21. See Lam 4:20. This does not seem to be a direct quotation, though Ambrose treats it as if it were.

22. See Eph 3:19.

23. Ambrose, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke (Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam)* 1, 24-27: PL 15, 1543-1545. Augustine again and again quotes from this passage later in this letter. I have not included further references to it.

24. See *Heresies* XLV. Photinus was bishop of Sirmium and a disciple of Marcellus of Ancyra. He was removed from his bishopric in 351, returned, and was again removed. He held an adoptionist position regarding Christ.

the Son of God from the womb of the Virgin and do not want to believe that he previously existed. But he saw other heretics, that is, the Arians,<sup>25</sup> lying in ambush to cause greater destruction. For their error undoubtedly receives support if it is believed that the nature of the Father is invisible, but that of the Son is visible. Hence, he affirmed that the nature of both of them is one and equally invisible, as well as that of the Holy Spirit. He briefly, but wonderfully taught this when he continued and said, "Or, at least it cannot be denied that the Father or the Son or surely the Holy Spirit, if there can be a vision of the Holy Spirit, is seen in that form which was chosen by their will and not that which was fashioned from their nature." He could have said, "Revealed by their nature," but he preferred to say, "Fashioned," so that God would not be thought to have fashioned from his own nature the form in which he chose to appear. For his substance would, as a result, be shown to be changeable and mutable. May God himself in his mercy and kindness keep this from the faith of his believers!

8. 20. By nature, therefore, God is invisible, not only the Father but also the Trinity itself, one God, and because he is not only invisible but also immutable, he appears as he wills in what form he wills so that his invisible and immutable nature remains whole within him. But the desire of truly pious persons by which they long and avidly desire to see God does not, I believe, burn to gaze upon that form in which he appears when he wills, which is not himself, but to gaze upon that substance by which he is what he is. The saintly Moses, his faithful servant, revealed the flame of this desire of his when he said to God, with whom he was speaking face to face like a friend,<sup>26</sup> *If I have found favor before you, show yourself to me* (Ex 33:13 LXX). What, then, does this mean? Was that not God? If it was not God, Moses would not say to him, *Show me yourself*, but, "Show me God," and yet, if he looked upon his nature and substance, he would have much less reason to say, *Show me yourself*. God was, therefore, in that form in which he had willed to appear, but he did not appear in his own nature, which Moses longed to see. That vision is, of course, promised to the saints in the next life. Hence, the reply given to Moses is true, that *no one can see the face of God and live* (Ex 33:20), that is, no one can, while living in this life, see him as he is. For many have seen him but have seen what was chosen by his will, not what was fashioned from his nature. And if one correctly understands it, this is what John said, *Beloved, we are now the children of God, and it has not yet appeared what we shall be. We know that, when he appears, we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is* (1 Jn 3:2), not as human beings saw him when God willed and in the form in which he willed, not in the nature in which he was in himself

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25. See *Heresies* XLIX. Arius was an Alexandrian priest after whom the Arian heresy was named. Arianism took various forms during the fourth and fifth centuries but in essence held that the Son was less than the Father.

26. See Ex 33:11.

hidden, even when he was seen, but *as he is*. This is what Moses asked of him when he said to him, *Show me yourself*; he asked this of him *with whom he was speaking face to face*, (21) not that anyone has ever grasped the fullness of God not only by the eyes of the body but even by the mind itself.

9. For it is one thing to see; it is another to grasp the whole by seeing. For that which is somehow perceived when it is present is, of course, seen, but the whole is grasped by seeing when it is seen in such a way that nothing of it escapes the attention of the seer or when its boundaries can be seen. For example, nothing in your present will escapes your attention, and you can see the boundaries of your ring. As examples I gave you these two, one of which pertains to the sight of the mind, the other to bodily eyes. Vision, as Ambrose said, can refer to both of them, that is, to the eyes and to the mind.

22. But *no one has ever seen God* because, as that man argued whose words we are considering, "no one has seen the fullness of his divinity; no one has grasped it with the mind or eyes. For 'has seen' refers to both of these." Hence, it remains to ask how the angels see God, when one takes into account those words I cited from the gospel, *Their angels always see the face of my Father* (Mt 18:10). For, if he appears to them not as he is but in the form in which he wills to appear while his nature remains hidden, we have to ask all the more how we will see him as he is and as Moses desired to see him when he asked God, who was before his eyes, to show himself to him. It is, after all, promised to us as the highest reward in the resurrection that we be equal to the angels of God,<sup>27</sup> and, for this reason, if even they do not see him as he is, how are we going to see him in that way when we have been made equal to them in the resurrection? But see what our Ambrose says next. He says, "Then, when scripture adds, *The only-begotten Son has himself made him known*, it indicates a vision more of minds than of eyes. For a form is seen, but a power is made known. The former is grasped by the eyes; the latter by the mind." He who had said a little before that vision pertains to both has now assigned it not to the mind but to the eyes, not, I think, because he was careless in considering his words but because we are more accustomed in speaking to attribute vision to the eyes, just as we attribute form to a body. For our habitual way of speaking quite frequently uses the latter term for things that are contained in places and vary in colors. But if there were no form for the mind to see, he would not be said to be *beautiful in form before the sons of men* (Ps 45:3). We do not, after all, use this expression with regard to the flesh and not with regard to spiritual form. "Form," then, is used in reference to the vision of the mind. But because it is more frequently used of bodies or of the likenesses of bodies, Ambrose said, "For a form is seen, but a power is made known. The former is grasped by the eyes; the latter by the mind." Hence, when the Only-Begotten, who is in the bosom of the Father, makes him known by an inf-

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27. See Lk 20:36; Mt 22:30; Mk 12:25.



fable revelation, the pure and holy rational creature is filled with an ineffable vision of God, which we shall attain when we shall have been made equal to the angels. For *no one has ever seen God* as these visible bodies familiar to the senses are seen. For, if he was ever seen in that way, his nature was not seen as those things are seen but as he willed, appearing in the form in which he willed, while his nature was hidden and remained immutably in itself. But he is perhaps now seen by certain angels in that way in which he is seen as he is, but he will then be seen by us when we shall have been made equal to them.

10, 23. Then, when he had added that even the powers of the heavens, such as the seraphim, are seen only when they will and as they will, in order that from this we might also infer how great is the invisibility of the Trinity, he said, "And yet, though we do not have the power to see him, there is the grace to merit that we may be able to see him. And thus, one who had grace merited this power, but we do not merit this power because we do not have the grace of seeing God." By these words this man, who is not teaching his own ideas but explaining the gospel, did not want us to understand that some of those believers to whom *he gave the power to become children of God* (Jn 1:12) will see God, but some will not. For the words, *We shall see him as he is* (1 Jn 3:2), apply to all of them. But by saying "we do not merit this power because we do not have the grace of seeing God," he indicated that he was speaking of this world, in which God deigned to appear to certain persons, such as Abraham,<sup>28</sup> Isaiah,<sup>29</sup> and others like them, though not in his nature but in the form in which he willed to appear. But to countless others, even though they belong to his people and to his eternal inheritance, he does not show himself in any form or shows himself in such a form, but in the age to come all the clean of heart, who are going to receive the kingdom that was prepared for them from the beginning, will see him, and in that kingdom there will be only such people.

11, 24. Notice, then, what he adds when he now begins to speak about the age to come. He says, "And why is it surprising if in the present age the Lord is seen only when he wills to be seen? Even in the resurrection it is not easy to see God except for those who are clean of heart, and for this reason, *Blessed are the clean of heart because they shall see God* (Mt 5:8). How many others did the Lord declare blessed, and yet he did not promise these the ability to see God! If, then, those who are clean of heart will see God, the others, of course, will not see him. After all, the unworthy will not see God, nor can someone see God who has not wanted to see God." You see how cautiously he now speaks about those who will see God in the age to come, for they are not all, but those who are worthy. After all, both those worthy and those unworthy of that kingdom will rise when God is seen, because *all those who are in tombs will hear his voice and go forth*, but

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28. See Gn 18:1 and Nm 12:8.

29. See Is 6:1.

with a great difference. For those who have lived good lives will go forth into the resurrection of life, but those who have lived bad lives will go forth into the resurrection of judgment (Jn 5:28-29). Here "judgment" signifies eternal punishment, as does that statement too, *One who does not believe has already been judged* (Jn 3:18).

25. Hence, when Saint Ambrose said, "Nor can someone see God who has not wanted to see God," what else did he want us to understand but that someone who does not want to devote the care worthy of so great a matter to cleansing his heart does not want to see God? See what he adds next: "Nor is God seen in a location, but by a clean heart." What could he have said more clearly, more explicitly? From this vision, then, the devil, his angels, and all the wicked along with them have been excluded without a shadow of doubt, because they are not clean of heart. And for this reason we should not believe that the devil saw God because it says in the Book of Job that the angels entered into the sight of God and the devil entered along with them.<sup>30</sup> They were said to enter into the sight of God, not God into their sight. Those whom we see, not those by whom we are seen, enter into our sight. They came, therefore, as we read in many manuscripts, in order to stand in the presence of God, not in order that God might stand in their presence. Nor is there need for us to delay over this passage in order to try to show in accord with our abilities how this took place at some time since all things are always in the sight of God.

26. For now the question is how God is seen not in that form in which he willed to appear to certain persons, even in this age, when he spoke not only with Abraham and other righteous persons<sup>31</sup> but also with Cain, who murdered his brother.<sup>32</sup> Rather, the question is how he is seen in that kingdom in which his children will see him as he is. Then, of course, their desire will be satisfied with good things.<sup>33</sup> Moses burned with that desire when it was not enough for him to speak to God face to face<sup>34</sup> and he said, *Show yourself to me clearly in order that I may see you* (Ex 33:13 LXX), as if he were saying what we sing in the psalm out of the same desire, *I shall be satisfied when your glory will be revealed* (Ps 17:15). Philip too burned with that desire and longed to be satisfied in that way when he said, *Show us the Father, and it is enough for us* (Jn 14:8). Speaking of that vision, Ambrose himself, a man who loved and longed for it, said, "Nor is God seen in a location," as at the oak of Mambre or on Mount Sinai, "but by a clean heart." And he continues, knowing what he desires and what he yearns for and what he hopes, "God is not sought by bodily eyes," by the eyes to which he showed himself to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others in this age, "Nor envel-

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30. See Jb 1:6 and 2:1.

31. See Gn 18:1.

32. See Gn 4:6-7.9-15.

33. See Ps 103:5.

34. See Ex 33:11.

oped by sight,” on account of the words, *You will see my back* (Ex 33:23). “Nor [is he] held by touch,” as he also wrestled with Jacob;<sup>35</sup> “nor heard by words,” as he was heard, not only by so many saints, but also by the devil;<sup>36</sup> “nor perceived by his walk,” as he was once when he walked in paradise toward evening.<sup>37</sup>

27. You see how the holy man tries to remove our minds from all the senses of the flesh in order to make them suited to see God. And yet, what does such a man who plants and waters on the outside do unless God, who gives the increase, is at work within?<sup>38</sup> After all, without the help of the Spirit of God, who can think that something has more being than all those things that are perceived through the body, something that is not seen in a location, not to be sought with the eyes, nor heard by words, held by touch, or perceived by walking, and still is seen, but only by a clean heart? For he was not speaking of this life when he said this, for he distinguished well enough between this age, in which God appeared not as he is but in the form in which he willed and to whom he willed to appear, and the life of the age to come by a perfectly clear distinction. He said, “And why is it surprising if in the present age the Lord is seen only when he wills to be seen? Even in the resurrection it is not easy to see God except for those who are clean of heart, and for this reason, *Blessed are the clean of heart because they shall see God*” (Mt 5:8). From here he began to speak of that age when not all who rise but those who rise to eternal life will see God, not the unworthy of whom it was said, *Let the wicked man be removed lest he see the brightness of the Lord* (Is 26:10 LXX), but the worthy of whom the Lord himself said when he was not seen though he was present, *Anyone who loves me keeps my commandments* (Jn 14:21), and, *Anyone who loves me is loved by my Father, and I shall love him and show myself to him* (Jn 14:23), not those to whom it will be said, *Enter into the eternal fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels* (Mt 25:41), but those to whom it will be said, *Come, blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom which was prepared for you from the beginning of the world* (Mt 25:34). *The former*, of course, *will go into eternal flames, but the righteous will go into eternal life* (Mt 25:46). And what is eternal life but what Life itself elsewhere says, *This is eternal life, that they may know you the one true God and Jesus Christ whom you sent* (Jn 17:3), but in that way in which he promised that he would show to those who love him that he is one God with the Father, not in the way in which he was seen in this world by the good and by the evil?

28. And in the future judgment, when he will come in the way he was seen going into heaven,<sup>39</sup> that is, in the same form of the Son of Man, they to whom he will say, *I was hungry and you did not give me anything to eat* (Mt 25:42), will

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35. See Gn 32:24-30.

36. See Gn 3:14.

37. See Gn 3:8.

38. See I Cor 3:7.

39. See Acts 1:11.

see the same form. For even the Jews will see him *whom they have pierced* (Zec 12:10), not that form of God in which he *did not consider it robbery to be equal to God* (Phil 2:6). Those who will see him as he is will then see him in that form of God. They will not see him because they were poor in spirit in this life, because they were meek, because they mourned, because they hungered and thirsted for righteousness, because they were peacemakers, because they suffered persecution on account of righteousness, even though these same people are all these, but they will see him because they were clean of heart.<sup>40</sup> For this reason, among those beatitudes, although those who have a clean heart do all these things, it still nowhere said, *They will see God*, except where it said, *Blessed are the clean of heart* (Mt 5:8). For he will be seen by a clean heart who is not "seen in a location," nor "sought by bodily eyes, nor enveloped by sight, nor held by touch, nor heard by words, nor perceived by his walk." For *no one has ever seen God* either in this life, as he is, or in the life of the angels, as these things are seen that are perceived by bodily vision. For *the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father has himself made him known* (Jn 1:18). Hence, what he makes known was said to pertain to the vision, not of bodily eyes, but of minds.

12. 29. But again, lest our desire wander from one sense of the body to another, that is, from the eyes to the ears, after he had said, "God is not sought by bodily eyes, nor enveloped by sight, nor held by touch," he also added, "nor heard by words," in order that we might understand, if we can, the only-begotten Son *who is in the bosom of the Father* and who makes him known in the way in which he is the Word, not like a sound striking our ears, but like an image becoming known to our minds. And in that way the words, *One who has seen me has also seen the Father* (Jn 14:9), might there become clear by an internal and ineffable light. He said this to Philip when Philip saw him and did not see him. For the great lover of this vision, Ambrose, goes on and says, "And when he is thought not to be there, he is seen, and he is not seen when he is there." He did not say, "When he is not there," but, "When he is thought not to be there," for nowhere is he not present. He fills the heavens and the earth and is not enclosed in small places or spread out in large ones but is whole everywhere and contained by no place. One who understands this with a penetrating mind sees God, even when he is thought not to be there. But let one who cannot do this pray and act in order that he may merit to be able to do so, and let him ask not of a human teacher, that he may learn what he does not know, but of the divine savior, that he may be able to do what he is unable to do. But he next explains why he said, "And he is not seen when he is there," when he says, "Finally, not all the apostles saw Christ, and for this reason he said, *I have been with you for so long a time, and have you still not known me?*" (Jn 14:9). See how God was there and not seen.

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40. See Mt 5:3-10.

30. But why did he not dare to say, "Finally, the apostles did not see Christ," but said, "Not all the apostles saw Christ," as if at that time some saw him by that vision in which he and the Father are one? Or did he perhaps have in mind the fact that, when Peter had said, *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God* (Mt 16:16), he received the reply, *Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, because flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven* (Mt 16:17)? And yet, it does not seem clear to me whether that revelation was produced in his mind through a faith in this great truth that he believed or through a vision of that truth that he saw, for even Peter himself showed him that he was so little as to fear that he would lose Christ when he died, although he had shortly before confessed that he was the son of the living God, that is, the source of life.

13. 31. Next, one can ask how the very substance of God could be seen by certain people still situated in this life because of what was said to Moses, *No one can see my face and live* (Ex 33:20), unless the human mind can be taken up by God from this life to the life of the angels before it is released from the flesh by this common death. For he was taken up in this way who heard there the ineffable words that a human being is not permitted to speak.<sup>41</sup> In that case there occurred a certain turning aside of the mind's attention from the senses of this life to the point that he said that he did not know whether he was in the body or outside the body,<sup>42</sup> that is, whether, while its union with the body remained, the mind was removed from this life to that life, as often occurs in very intense ecstasy, or whether the mind was totally released from the body, as happens in complete death. And in that way the statement, *No one can see my face and live*, is true, because the mind must be withdrawn from this life when it is taken up into that ineffable vision, and it is not unbelievable that so excellent a revelation had also been granted to certain of the saints who had not yet died so that their corpses were left behind for burial. I think that Ambrose had this idea when he did not want to say, "Nor did the apostles see Christ," but said, "Nor did all the apostles see Christ," for he believed that the vision of the divinity itself, about which he was speaking, could even at that time have been given to some of them, at least on account of blessed Paul. For he too was an apostle, though of course the last, and he did not remain silent about that ineffable revelation of his.

32. And yet it would be strange if Moses, that most faithful servant of God from of old, who was destined to labor on this earth and still govern that people, was not granted what he asked for, namely, that he might see the brightness of the Lord, to whom he had said, *If I have found favor before you, show yourself to me clearly* (Ex 33:13 LXX). For he received a reply suited to the present time, namely, that he could not see the face of God, which no one has seen and lived,<sup>43</sup>

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41. See 2 Cor 12:4.

42. See 2 Cor 12:2.

43. See Ex 33:20.

and in that way God signified that such a vision belongs to the other and better life. Then the mystery of the future Church of Christ was prefigured in the words of God. Moses, of course, was the symbol of the people of the Jews who would afterward believe in the suffering Christ. Therefore it was said to him, *When I pass by, you shall see my back* (Ex 33:23 LXX) and the other words that are said there in a marvelous mystery that predicted the Church that would exist later, but it would now take too long to discuss this. But what I had begun to say, namely, that what he had asked for was granted to his desire, was later shown in the Book of Numbers. There the Lord blames the insolence of Moses' sister and says that he appeared to the other prophets in a vision and in a dream, but appeared to Moses in plain sight, not through an enigma.<sup>44</sup> There he also added, *And he saw the glory of the Lord* (Nm 12:8). Why is it that God made such an exception of Moses unless he perhaps also considered such a ruler and servant of his people, who was faithful in his whole house,<sup>45</sup> worthy at that time of that contemplation, that is, so that, just as he desired, he saw God as he is, which is the same contemplation that is promised to all his children in the end?

14. 33. That holy man, I believe, whose words we are examining, considered these ideas. He said, "Nor did all the apostles see Christ," because even at that time some of them had perhaps seen him in accord with what I said. But to prove what he said, namely, that not all saw him, he immediately added, "And for this reason he said, *I have been with you for so long a time, and have you still not known me?*" (Jn 14:9). And then adding the sort of person by whom God is seen as he is in that contemplation, he said, "For one who has known *what is the breadth, length, height, and depth and the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge* (Eph 3:18-19) has also seen Christ, has also seen the Father."<sup>46</sup>

34. I usually interpret these words of the apostle Paul as follows: In the breadth there are the good works of love; in the length, perseverance up to the end; in the height, the hope of heavenly rewards; and in the depth, the inscrutable judgments of God, from which this grace comes to human beings.<sup>47</sup> And I also fit this interpretation to the mystery of the cross so that in the breadth I understand the crossbeam by which his hands are stretched out in order to signify works. In the length from it to the earth, on which the whole crucified body is seen to stand, I find what signifies persistence, that is, to remain with longanimity. In the height from the crossbeam upwards I find what stands out toward the top on account of the expectation of heavenly blessings, so that no one may suppose that we should do those good works and persevere in them on account of God's earthly and temporal benefits but rather on account of that everlasting benefit

44. See Nm 12:6-8.

45. See Nm 12:7.

46. See Jn 14:9.

47. See Letter 140, 25, 62.

from above, which *the faith that works through love* (Gal 5:6) hopes for. In the depth, however, there is that part of the wood that is not seen because it is fixed in the recesses of the earth, but from it there emerges all of what rises above, as a human being is called by the hidden will of God to partake of such a great grace, one in this way, another in that.<sup>48</sup> But the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge is, of course, that in which there is that peace which surpasses all understanding.<sup>49</sup> But whether that commentator on the gospel also found this in those words of the apostle or something else perhaps more suitable, you nonetheless see, unless I am mistaken, that this interpretation does not conflict with the rule of faith.

35. But we are, as a result, now concerned with spiritual vision, since he had said, "One who has known *what is the breadth, length, height, depth and the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge* has also seen Christ, has also seen the Father." So that no one of a much slower sort might think that he was speaking of bodily vision, he said, "For we no longer know Christ in terms of the flesh, but in terms of the spirit.<sup>50</sup> Christ the Lord is, after all, spirit before our eyes."<sup>51</sup> When he said here "we know," he said this in terms of the faith that exists at present, not in terms of the contemplation that will exist hereafter. For we also know whatever we hold *by faith unfeigned* (1 Tm 1:5), even though we do not yet see it by vision we nonetheless already hold firmly to it by faith. Then, after he had said that he no longer knew Christ in terms of the flesh, as the apostle says, and had added the testimony of the prophet, "Christ the Lord is, after all, spirit before our eyes," he immediately added, "He deigns by his mercy to fill us with all the fullness of God in order that he can be seen by us."<sup>52</sup> Certainly it is clear that, where he said, "we know," he spoke of that knowledge that comes from faith, the faith from which the righteous now live,<sup>53</sup> not the contemplation by which we shall see God as he is.<sup>54</sup> For, as a consequence, he desired this latter for himself and for us and signified that it was to come, when he said, "He deigns by his mercy to fill us with all the fullness of God in order that he can be seen by us."<sup>55</sup>

15. 36. Some have understood this fullness of God, of which the apostle speaks, in such a way as to think that we will be precisely what God is. For the apostle set forth these words, as you see, when he was speaking as follows, *Also to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge in order that you may be filled with all the fullness of God* (Eph 3:19). Hence, they say, if we shall have less than God and shall be less in some respect, how shall we be filled with all the

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48. See 1 Cor 7:7; also see Letter 140, 26, 64.

49. See Phil 4:7.

50. See 2 Cor 5:16.

51. See Lam 4:20.

52. See Eph 3:19.

53. See Hb 2:4, Rom 1:17, Gal 3:11, and Heb 10:38.

54. See 1 Jn 3:2.

55. See Eph 3:19.

fullness of God? But since we shall be filled, we shall certainly be equal to him. I know that you, of course, reject and detest this error of the human mind, and you are right. But we shall discuss afterward, if God is willing, in accord with powers he has given us, how this fullness is to be interpreted, of which it was said that we will be filled with all the fullness of God.

37. But now, by recalling what has already been said, pay careful attention to whether I have explained the question that you posed me and that seemed difficult to explain. For, if you ask whether God can be seen, I reply: He can. If you ask how I know this, I reply: Because we read in the scripture, which is completely true, *Blessed are the clean of heart because they shall see God* (Mt 5:8) and other such passages. If you ask how he was said to be invisible if he can be seen, I reply that he is invisible by nature, but is seen when he wills and as he wills. For he was seen by very many, not as he is, but in the sort of form in which he chose to appear. If you ask how even Cain, a criminal, saw him when he was questioned by God about his crime and condemned,<sup>56</sup> or how even the devil saw him when he came with his angels to stand in his presence,<sup>57</sup> if the clean of heart are blessed *because they shall see God*, I reply that it does not necessarily follow that those who heard words that God uttered also saw God. For they also did not see God who heard him when he said to the Son, *And I have glorified you, and I shall glorify you again* (Jn 12:28). We should not, nonetheless, be surprised if even some who are not clean of heart see God in the form that was produced by his will, while his nature remained hidden, invisible and immutable within him. If you ask whether he can also be seen at some time as he is, I reply that this was promised to the children of whom it was said, *We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is* (1 Jn 3:2). If you ask how we shall see him, I reply: As the angels see him, for we shall then be equal to them.<sup>58</sup> For, in the way these things that we call visible are seen, *no one has ever seen God or can see him* (1 Tm 6:16), because he dwells in inaccessible light and he is invisible by nature as he is incorruptible. The apostle stated these ideas one after the other when he said, *But to the King of the ages who is invisible and incorruptible* (1 Tm 1:17). For, as he is now incorruptible and will not be corruptible later, so he is invisible not only now but always. For he is not "seen in a location, but by a clean heart. God is not sought by bodily eyes, nor enveloped by sight, nor held by touch, nor heard by words, nor perceived by his walk." But *the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father* (Jn 1:18) makes known without a sound the nature and substance of the godhead and also invisibly reveals it to eyes worthy and fit for such a vision. For these are the eyes of which the apostle says, *With the eyes of your hearts enlightened* (Eph 1:18) and of

56. See Gn 4:6-15.

57. See Jb 1:6 and 2:1.

58. See Mt 18:10 and Lk 20:36.



which it is said, *Enlighten my eyes so that I may never sleep in death* (Ps 12:4). *For the Lord is Spirit* (Jn 4:24). Hence, *one who clings to the Lord is one spirit* (1 Cor 6:17). And so, one who can invisibly see God can cling to God in an incorporeal way.

16, 38. I think that in the question that you posed there is no longer anything more to ask. But in this whole discussion of ours consider what you saw, what you believed, and what you still do not know—whether because I did not say it or because you did not understand it or because you judged that you should not believe it. And go on to distinguish how you saw those things that you saw were true, whether it was by recalling that you saw them through the body, such as heavenly and earthly bodies, or whether you never attained them by bodily seeing but, in looking with the mind alone, you saw that they were true and certain, such as your will. About your will I can believe you when you speak of it, but I myself cannot see it as you see it. And when you have distinguished these two, also pay attention to how you distinguish them. For, though we see some things by the body and others by the mind, the very distinction between these two kinds is seen by the mind, not by the body. And those things that are seen by the mind do not need any sense of the body in order for us to know that they are true. But those things that are seen through the body cannot be held as knowledge unless the mind is present to receive such things reported to it. And the mind leaves outside those things that it is said to receive in some sense, when they are reported to it. But in an incorporeal way it entrusts images of them, that is, incorporeal likenesses, to the memory, and it judges them after it brings them forth from there, as if from safekeeping, when it wills and can, and sets them before the vision of thought. And when it can, it also distinguishes these two, namely, what it left outside in bodily sight and what it sees within like that, and it recognizes that the latter is present when the former is absent, as you think of my bodily face when I am absent and as that image is present to you, although my face of which it is an image is absent. And this face of mine is a body, but that image of a body is incorporeal.

39. After you have carefully and faithfully examined and distinguished these things that you see, turn your attention to those things that you believe in this whole discussion from when I began to speak to you in this letter. And in those things to which you give faith, although they were not seen, consider by distinguishing them the authority of the witnesses. After all, you do not believe me in the way you believe Ambrose, from whose books I cited those valuable testimonies. Or if you think that you should believe both of us as having equal weight, will you in any way compare us to the gospel or set our writings on a par with the canonical scriptures? Certainly, if you are truly wise in drawing distinctions, you see that we are far below that authority and that I am indeed farther below it. But however much you believe both of us, you by no means set us on a par with that excellence. Hence, you believe more firmly the words of scripture, *No one*

*has ever seen God* (Jn 1:18), and, *He dwells in inaccessible light whom no human being has seen or can see* (1 Tm 6:16), and, *Blessed are the clean of heart because they shall see God* (Mt 5:8), and whatever else I quoted from those sacred books. You believe all these more firmly than Ambrose's words: "Nor is God seen in a location, but by a clean heart. God is not sought by bodily eyes, nor enveloped by sight, nor held by touch, nor heard by words, nor perceived by his walk." He, of course, understood and believed that God, who is seen by a clean heart, is such, and I admit that this is also my view.

40. You therefore accept in faith these words in one way and the words of God in another. For there may be some concern in our regard that we understand something less clearly in the words of God and that we are explaining them not in the sense in which they were written but in a sense that we are guessing at. After all, you perhaps say within yourself, "What if God is seen by a clean heart and is, nonetheless, seen in a location?" or, "What if those who are clean of heart will also see God with bodily eyes when this corruptible body has put on incorruption,<sup>59</sup> when we will be equal to the angels?"<sup>60</sup> You perhaps do not know how much you should or should not believe us, and you pay attention so that you are not misled in believing us more or less than you ought. But you do not doubt that you should believe the divine scriptures even though you have not yet clearly understood them. But in your mind you certainly attend to and see as they are the reason to believe or not, the difficulty of knowing, the turmoil of doubt, and the pious faith that we owe to the words of God. Nor do you have any doubt at all about these things because they are present within you, either as I have said or as you yourself know. You therefore see your faith; you see your doubt; you see your eagerness and willingness to learn; and when the divine authority moves you to believe what you do not see, you nonetheless see that you believe these things without hesitation. You separate and distinguish all these.

17. 41. Will you, then, in any way compare the eyes of the body to these eyes of your heart by which you see that all these things are true and certain and behold and discern that they are invisibly present to you? For you judge not by these same eyes of the flesh but by those interior eyes even concerning the visible things themselves upon which the bodily eyes somehow cast the rays of their sight and concerning these visible eyes and their sight, however fine and great it may be. You judge how much these differ from those invisible though not more excellent things to which you owe faith, even if they are not seen, but how much they differ from those things that I mentioned, which you do not believe when absent, but see with the mind when present. The interior eyes are the judges of the exterior eyes, while these latter serve the former in a certain office and ministry of reporting. And the interior eyes see many things that these

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59. See 1 Cor 15:53.

60. See Lk 20:36.

exterior eyes do not see, but these exterior eyes see nothing about which those interior eyes judge as they preside over them. Who, then, would not prefer those interior eyes to these exterior eyes as inestimably more valuable?

42. Since this is so, I beg you, when you are carrying out this great task in yourself, when you distinguish interior things from exterior ones and prefer the former to the latter in an ineffable way, when, with these external things left outside, you rest interiorly with the interior ones and pronounce judgment on them, assigning them to their own incorporeal boundaries, do you think that you are acting in no light or in some light? For I do not think that such great and such true and clear and certain things can be seen there without light. Gaze upon this light, then, in which you see all those things, and see whether any ray of bodily eyes can reach it. It certainly cannot. Pay attention also, and answer whether you see in it any stretches and intervals of places. You find there, I believe, nothing of the sort, if you watchfully drive from your interior sight whatever bodily images the senses of the exterior human being have introduced. But this is perhaps difficult. For, from the habit of living in the flesh, a crowd of phantasms surges into even those interior eyes in the likenesses of bodies. Having tried to resist this, I cried out in grief at least with the divine authority in that short letter and said, "Let the flesh drunk with its carnal thoughts hear this: *God is spirit*" (Jn 4:24).<sup>61</sup> For by that rebuke I did not quiet down anyone's mind more than my own from such vanity. We are, of course, more readily inclined to what is familiar, and it is pleasant for the weakness of the soul to introduce or to admit bodily associations within, not when it stands in good health but when it is bent over or lying down ill in some way.

43. Hence, if you cannot clear the gaze of your mind of, as it were, the cloud of bodily likenesses, pay watchful attention to them within yourself. Gaze upon heaven and earth by thinking, as you have often done by seeing with the eyes of the body, and see that those images of heaven and earth that were produced before the eyes of thought are likenesses of bodies, not bodies. In that way, then, judge against yourself for yourself if you cannot drive away all imaginary forms of bodily qualities from the gaze of your mind, and conquer by means of that by which you are being conquered. For there is no one, I believe, so given over to such imaginings that he believes that the sun, moon, stars, rivers, seas, mountains, hills, cities, and finally the walls of his house or room, and whatever of the sort he has known through the eyes of the body and retains, exist in his memory or before the vision of his thought in the same way that they either stand still or move about in stretches and intervals of place. But if those things that in our mind are most like bodily things and places, but are, nonetheless, not contained by stretches and boundaries of space and are not deposited in our memory in separate places, how much more do those things that bear no likeness to bodies have no stretches of place—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith,

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61. See Letter 92, 5.

mildness, and continence.<sup>62</sup> No areas of space contain them. They are separated by no gaps, nor do the eyes of the heart seek some spaces through which they might send out their rays and see them. Are not all of them in one spot without any crowding, and are they not known with their boundaries without any surrounding areas? Or tell me in what place you see love, which is, nonetheless, known to you to the extent that you can see it with the gaze of your mind. You did not think that love was great because you let your eyes wander over some huge mass, nor, when it speaks to you interiorly so that you live in accord with it, does it make any loud sounds. You do not raise up the light of your bodily eyes to see it or build up the strength of your bodily arms to hold it firmly, nor do you perceive its walk when it enters your mind.

44. See, however slight love is, it resides in our will and is seen by our sight, and it "is not seen in a location," nor "sought by bodily eyes, nor enveloped by sight, nor held by touch, nor heard by words, nor perceived by" its "walk." How much more is this true of God himself, since love is the guarantee he has given us! For our interior self, however slight an image of him it is, not born from him but created by him, though it is still being renewed from day to day, still remains now in such light where no sensation of the bodily eyes approaches, and those things that we gaze upon in that light are both distinguished from one another and separated by no stretches of space. How much more, then, is this true of God, who *dwells in inaccessible light* (1 Tm 6:16) where only the clean of heart can approach! Since we, therefore, prefer this light to all bodily light not only by the judgment of reason but also by the desire of love, we shall be able to do this better to the extent we do it more, until all the infirmities of our soul are healed by him who has taken pity upon all our sins.<sup>63</sup> For, once we have become spiritual in this more vigorous life, we shall be able to judge all things, but we ourselves will be judged by no one.<sup>64</sup> *The natural human being, however, does not perceive what belongs to the Spirit of God, for it is foolishness to him, and he cannot know it since it is discerned spiritually* (1 Cor 2:14).

18. 45. But if we cannot as yet prefer the light that judges to the light that is judged, if we cannot prefer the life that understands to the life that has only sensation, if we cannot prefer the nature that does not have one part here and another part there but has all that it has together in one place, just as our intelligence itself does, to that nature that is composed of parts so that half of it is less than the whole, just as every body is, we are uselessly discussing such great and excellent things. But if we can already do this, let us believe that God is something better than our intellect in order that his peace, which surpasses all understanding, may protect our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus.<sup>65</sup> For the peace

62. See Gal 5:22-23.

63. See Ps 103:3.

64. See 1 Cor 2:15.

65. See Phil 4:7.

that surpasses all understanding is not, of course, less than our intellect so that, though our intellect is invisible for bodily eyes, that peace is thought to be visible. Or is the peace of God something other than the splendor of God? For that splendor is the only-begotten Son; his is the love that surpasses all knowledge,<sup>66</sup> and by knowledge of him we will be filled with all the fullness of God. That peace is not less than the light of our mind that we receive when it enlightens us. But if this light is inaccessible to the eyes of the flesh, how much more is that light which incomparably surpasses it! And for this reason, since there is something of us that is visible, such as this body, and something of us that is invisible, such as our interior self, and since our best part, that is, our mind and intelligence, is invisible to the eyes of the body, how can that which is better than our best part be visible to our lesser part?

19, 46. I think that you now grant, after considering all these points, that Ambrose was right to say that "God is not seen in a location, but by a clean heart" and that he "is not sought by bodily eyes, nor enveloped by sight, nor held by touch, nor heard by words, nor perceived by his walk." And if we understand less some point among these or hold another view, God will also reveal it to us if we continue on the path by which we have come.<sup>67</sup> We have, however, come to believe that God is not a body but a spirit<sup>68</sup>; that *no one has ever seen God* (Jn 1:18); that *God is light, and there is no darkness in him* (1 Jn 1:5); that *in God there is no variation or shadow of change* (Jas 1:17); that *he whom no human being has seen or can see dwells in inaccessible light* (1 Tm 6:16); that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one God without any otherness or separation of nature and that the clean of heart will see him;<sup>69</sup> that *we shall be like him because we will see him as he is* (1 Jn 3:2); that *God is love, and one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in that person* (1 Jn 4:16); that we ought to pursue peace and holiness without which no one can see God;<sup>70</sup> that this corruptible and mortal body of ours will be changed at the resurrection and will put on incorruptibility and immortality;<sup>71</sup> that a natural body is sown but a spiritual body will rise<sup>72</sup> when the Lord transforms the body of our lowly condition to make it conform to the body of his glory;<sup>73</sup> that God made man to his image and likeness;<sup>74</sup> that we are being renewed in the spirit of our mind,<sup>75</sup> in the knowledge

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66. See Eph 3:19.

67. See Phil 3:15-16.

68. See Jn 4:24.

69. See Mt 5:8.

70. See Heb 12:14.

71. See 1 Cor 15:53.

72. See 1 Cor 15:44

73. See Phil 3:21.

74. See Gn 1:26-27.

75. See Eph 4:23.

of God in accord with the image of him who created us.<sup>76</sup> Walking by faith in these and such authorities of the holy scriptures, those who have made progress spiritually, with God giving or helping their understanding, and who could compare different spiritual realities, have seen that they are seen better by the mind than by the body and that those things are seen by the mind that are not contained in places or separated from one another by intervals of space or are smaller in a part than in the whole.

47. This is why he says with confidence that “God is not seen in a location, but by a clean heart. He is not sought by bodily eyes, nor enveloped by sight, nor held by touch, nor heard in words, nor perceived in his walk.” We are taught in the holy scriptures that his substance is invisible, and we find in the same authorities that he was seen by very many either by the body and in bodily places or by the spirit, in which we see bodily images, through some likeness to a body, though an incorporeal one, as in dreams or in ecstasy.<sup>77</sup> Hence, that holy man of God removed the nature of God from such visions and said that they were something chosen by God’s will, not something fashioned from his nature. For God produces them in order to appear by means of them as he wills, to whom he wills, and when he wills, while his substance remains immutably hidden in him. If our will, while remaining in itself and hidden without any change in itself, utters words by which it somehow or other reveals itself, how much more easily can almighty God appear, while his nature is hidden and remains immutably, in whatever form he wills, to whom he wills! For he created all things from nothing<sup>78</sup> and, while remaining in himself, he renews all things.<sup>79</sup>

20. 48. But for that vision by which we shall see God as he is, he warned us to make our hearts clean. For, because in the ordinary way of speaking visible things are called bodies, God is said to be invisible in order that he may not be thought to be a body, not because clean hearts will be deprived of the contemplation of his substance. For to those who worship and love God this is promised, as the Lord himself says, as a great and supreme reward when he will appear visibly to bodily eyes, and he promised to allow himself to be seen, though invisible, by the clean of heart: *Whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and show myself to him* (Jn 14:21). This nature of his is, of course, equally invisible along with the Father, just as it is equally incorruptible. The apostle, as we said above, put these ideas one right after the other, teaching human beings in what words he could

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76. See Col 3:10.

77. In his *Literal Meaning of Genesis* XII, 6, 15. Augustine distinguishes three sorts of vision: bodily, spiritual, and intellectual. Bodily vision is the familiar vision of bodily things with our eyes. Spiritual vision or vision in the spirit is the picturing of things in the imagination. Intellectual vision is the vision of intelligible things with the eyes of the mind.

78. See 2 Mc 7:28.

79. See Wis 7:27.

about the divine substance.<sup>80</sup> If bodily eyes will see it in the resurrection after the character of our bodies has been changed, let those who can defend this view see to it. I am more influenced by the statement of Ambrose who did not attribute this to bodily eyes, even in the resurrection, but to clean hearts.

21, 49. And I do not refuse either to teach or to search out something concerning the character of the spiritual body that is promised to those who will rise, at least if in arguing about this issue we can avoid those vices that are very often stirred up by passionate discussions among human beings when one is puffed up with pride against another beyond what is written.<sup>81</sup> Otherwise, in seeking to investigate through arguments how God can be seen, we might lose the peace and holiness without which no one can see God.<sup>82</sup> May God keep this from our hearts in order that he may make them clean and keep them clean for the contemplation of himself. Nonetheless, since I do not have any doubt that the nature of God is not seen in any location, I do not ask about it. Now I am ready to hear with the peace of love from those who are able to prove through argument whether something that is not seen in a location can be seen by the eyes of the body. There are some who presume that God is nothing but a body, supposing that whatever is not a body is not a substance at all.<sup>83</sup> I think that we must oppose them in every way. But there are others who have no doubt that God is not a body but think that those who will rise for eternal life will also see God through the body, for they hope that the spiritual body will be such that even what was flesh will become spirit. But if this is the case, I think that you can very easily judge how much this differs from the previous opinion and how much more tolerable it is, even if it is not true. For, first of all, it makes a great difference whether one holds something other than the truth concerning the creator or concerning a creature. Secondly, we should bear with the effort of a mind that somehow tries to turn a body into a spirit, but not one that tries to turn a body into God. Finally, even if what I said in that letter of mine concerning these eyes of the flesh, namely, they neither are now able nor will then be able to see God, is true, I said this only of those bodily eyes, and they will not exist at that point if the body itself will be a spirit. And for this reason, bodily eyes will never see God, because, when he will be seen, a spirit will see him, not a body.

50. The whole question, then, about the spiritual body remains, that is, to what extent this corruptible and mortal body dons incorruptibility and immortality and to what extent it is changed from natural to spiritual.<sup>84</sup> It must be exam-

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80. See above 15, 37.

81. See 1 Cor 4:6.

82. See Heb 12:14.

83. Tertullian, the great African theologian of the second century, held that both God and the soul were bodies on the grounds that something non-bodily is only an abstraction. See his *The Soul (De anima)* 7: PL 2:657 and *The Flesh of Christ (De carne Christi)* 11: PL 2, 774.

84. See 1 Cor 15:53.

ined with more care and concern, especially on account of the body of the Lord who transforms the body of our lowly condition to be conformed to the body of his glory in order to be able to subject all things to himself.<sup>85</sup> After all, since God the Father sees the Son and the Son the Father, we should undoubtedly not listen to those who want to attribute vision exclusively to bodies. Nor are we permitted to say that the Father does not see the Son or that, if vision pertains only to a body, he wrapped himself in a body in order that he might see him. What about the fact that in the very beginning of the world, before the Son had assumed any form of a slave,<sup>86</sup> God saw that the light was good,<sup>87</sup> as well as the firmament, the sea, the dry land, every kind of plant, every sort of tree, the sun, the moon, the stars, the reptiles, the birds of the sky, and the living soul.<sup>88</sup> Finally, *God saw all the things he made, and see, they were very good* (Gn 1:31). Since scripture repeated this so many times for all the creatures, I wonder how the opinion arose by which they thought that vision belongs only to bodies. From whatever habit of speech that opinion may have arisen, the holy scriptures, nonetheless, do not speak in that way. For they attributed vision not only to the body but also to the spirit and more to the spirit than to the body. Otherwise, the prophets, who saw even the future, not with the body but with the spirit, would not have been called seers in the proper sense.<sup>89</sup>

22, 51. But we must reflect so that we do not venture too far by saying that the body will lose not only corruptibility and mortality but also its very nature as a body and become a spirit through the glory of the resurrection. In that way, of course, the substance of spirit will become twofold if the body will also be a spirit. Or if there will be only one spirit in a human being so that, after the body has been changed and transformed into a spirit, the spirit is not doubled either by receiving a twin or by increase or in any way enlarged by some addition in quantity, we would have to fear that it would seem that we were saying nothing else but that those bodies would not only not remain immortal but would not exist at all and would utterly perish. Hence, until it is discovered by diligent inquiry and with the help of the Lord what we should hold as more probable according to the scriptures concerning the spiritual body that is promised us, let it suffice for the time being that the only-begotten Son, who is also the mediator between God and human beings, the man Jesus Christ,<sup>90</sup> sees the Father just as he is seen by the Father. But let us not try to transfer from this world to that vision of God, which is promised us in the resurrection, this concupiscence of the eyes, but let us strive to make our eyes clean with a pious love, and let us not think of a bodily face

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85. See Phil 3:21.

86. See Phil 2:7.

87. See Gn 1:4.

88. See Gn 1:6-25.

89. See 1 Sm 9:9 and 2 Sm 17:13.

90. See 1 Tm 2:5.



when the apostle says, *We see now through a glass obscurely, but we shall see then face to face* (1 Cor 13:12), especially since he quite explicitly says, *Now I know in part, but then I shall know him as I am known* (1 Cor 13:12). If, therefore, we shall then know God with the eyes of our bodily face, we are now known by the eyes of his bodily face. For he says, *Then I shall know him as I am known*. Hence, who would fail to understand that he also wanted to signify in that passage that face of ours of which he says in another place: *But as we gaze upon the glory of the Lord with face unveiled, we will all be transformed into the same image of him from one glory to another glory as if by the Spirit of the Lord* (2 Cor 3:18), that is, from the glory of faith into the glory of eternal contemplation? This transformation by which the interior self is renewed from day to day<sup>91</sup> is, of course, what does this. Of this the apostle Peter also spoke when he taught how the interior self ought to be adorned: *Let not their outer selves be adorned with the braiding of their hair or with gold, pearls, and expensive clothing, but that hidden person of the heart, who is rich before God* (1 Pt 3:3-4). The Jews have a veil over this face because they do not cross over to Christ. Because the veil is removed when anyone crosses over to Christ, we are being transformed into his image with the veil removed. But he says with perfect clarity: *A veil has been placed over their hearts* (2 Cor 3:15). And so there is the face with which, once it has been unveiled, we now see through faith, though through a glass obscurely, but then we shall see face to face.

23, 52. If you approve of this, hold with me that view of the holy man, Ambrose, that has now been confirmed not by his authority but by the truth itself. For I am not pleased with it just because the Lord set me free from error, especially through the words of that man, and granted me the grace of saving baptism through his ministry, as if I were favoring him too much as the one who planted and watered me. I am, rather, pleased with it because Ambrose also said what God, who gives the increase, says to one who thinks piously and understands correctly: "In the resurrection," therefore, "it is not easy to see God except for those who are clean of heart, and for this reason, *Blessed are the clean of heart because they shall see God* (Mt 5:8). How many others did the Lord list as blessed, and yet he did not promise these the ability to see God! If, then, those who are clean of heart will see God, the others, of course, will not see him. After all, the unworthy will not see God, nor can someone see God who has not wanted to see God. Nor is God seen in a location, but by a clean heart. God is not sought by bodily eyes, nor enveloped by sight, nor held by touch, nor heard by words, nor perceived by his walk. And when he is thought not to be there, he is seen, and he is not seen when he is there. Finally, not all the apostles saw Christ, and for this reason he said, *I have been with you for so long a time, and have you still not known me?* (Jn 14:9). For one who has known *what is the breadth, length,*

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91. See 2 Cor 4:16.

*height, and depth and the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge* (Eph 3:18-19) has also seen Christ, has also seen the Father.<sup>92</sup> For we no longer know Christ in terms of the flesh but in terms of the spirit.<sup>93</sup> Christ the Lord is, after all, spirit before our eyes;<sup>94</sup> he deigns by his mercy to fill us with all the fullness of God<sup>95</sup> in order that he can be seen by us.”

53. To the extent that you understand these words of the holy man, which are not carnal but spiritual, and recognize that they are true not because he said them but because the truth silently shouts them out, to that extent you understand why you cling to the Lord and ready your own self interiorly as a non-bodily place for him to dwell in order that you may hear the silence of his speaking and see his invisible form. For *blessed are the clean of heart because they shall see God* (Mt 5:8), not when he will appear to them like a body at some distance in space but when he will come to them and make his dwelling with them. For in that way they will be filled with the fullness of God, not when they are fully God but when they are perfectly full of God. But if we think only of bodies and cannot at least think worthily of that by which we actually think of bodies, let us not seek for something to say against ourselves but let us rather make our hearts clean of this carnal habit by praying and by stretching ourselves out to what is ahead.<sup>96</sup> For, to mention not only what blessed Ambrose but also what the holy Jerome said, “The eyes of the flesh are unable to see not only the divinity of the Father but also that of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, because there is one nature in the Trinity, but the eyes of the mind can. Of these eyes the savior himself says, *Blessed are the clean of heart because they shall see God*” (Mt 5:8).<sup>97</sup> For, as the same Jerome elsewhere briefly and truthfully declared, “Something non-bodily is not seen by bodily eyes.”<sup>98</sup>

54. I wanted to insert these statements of such great men on such an important topic not in order that you should think that you ought to follow the mind of any human being as if it possessed the authority of the canonical scripture but in order that those who hold another view may try to see with the mind what is true and seek God in the simplicity of their heart,<sup>99</sup> so that they do not criticize such learned commentators on the divine scriptures. Nor should what certain people ask with less consideration disturb you: “What will the eyes of the body see then if they will not see God? Will they perhaps be blind, or will they exist without any reason?” For those who say these things do not notice that, if there will not

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92. See Jn 14:9.

93. See 2 Cor 5:16.

94. See Lam 4:20.

95. See Eph 3:19.

96. See Phil 3:13.

97. Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah* III, 6, verse 1: PL 24, 93.

98. See Jerome, *Interlinear Commentary on Job* (*Expositio interlinearis libri Job*) 9: PL 26, 1420.

This is not a direct quotation from any work of Jerome found in PL.

99. See Wis 1:1.

be bodies, those bodily eyes will certainly not exist either. But if there will be bodies, there will be something that bodily eyes can see. But I have now said enough, and if you consider these ideas, carefully reading and rereading them all from the beginning of the book, you will undoubtedly understand that you ought with his help to prepare a clean heart for seeing God. But, with regard to the spiritual body, if God gives us his help, we will see whether we can discuss it in some other work.<sup>100</sup>

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100. Augustine did treat the question in *The City of God* XXII, 29.

## Letter 148

In 413 or 414 Augustine wrote to Fortunatian, bishop of Sicca. In *Revisions II*, 41, quoted at the beginning of the previous letter, Augustine mentions that he found this memorandum in a manuscript with the previous letter and says that it was listed neither among his works nor among his letters. The memorandum is clearly related to the previous letter.

Augustine begins by asking Fortunatian to apologize to "our brother," presumably a fellow bishop, whom he has offended by his harsh language in maintaining that God is not and will not be seen by these bodily eyes (paragraph 1). As long as one does not hold that God is a body, it is somewhat tolerable, though incorrect, to suppose that our body will be so transformed that we will be able to see the incorporeal God with such new, but bodily, eyes (paragraph 2). Augustine, nonetheless, points to the absurdities that follow from supposing that the risen body will be so transformed that we can see the invisible God with our new bodily eyes (paragraph 3). Augustine begs for forgiveness for having given offense by his letter and hopes that his brother bishop will pardon him (paragraphs 4 and 5). He nonetheless goes on to cite passages from Ambrose and Jerome in support of his own position (paragraphs 6 and 7). He warns that we should not take the scripture's words about a face-to-face vision of God to imply that God has a bodily face (paragraph 8). Augustine cites other passages from Jerome, Athanasius, Phoebatius of Agen, whom he takes to be an Eastern bishop named Gregory, probably Gregory Nazianzen, and Ambrose, all of whom maintain that God is seen by the eyes of the mind, not of the body (paragraphs 9 and 10).

The apostle linked together God's invisibility and immutability; hence, God will remain invisible but will be seen by the eyes of the heart (paragraph 11). Ambrose too taught that God will be seen, but only by the clean of heart (paragraph 12). Augustine explains how we are to understand the anthropomorphism of the scriptures (paragraph 13). He cites a passage from Jerome in which the latter speaks against those who think of God as having a human form (paragraph 14). Augustine explains why he has cited so many ecclesiastical writers and insists that their authority must never be set on a par with the canonical scriptures (paragraph 15). Finally, Augustine admits that he still does not know all of what will be involved in the transformation of our body into a spiritual body (paragraph 16). Even if God will somehow be seen exteriorly by the eyes of the spiritual body, he will surely continue to be seen interiorly by the eyes of the mind (paragraph 17). Whether we can discover the nature of the spiritual body or not, we should still believe the clear statements of scripture that the interior self will see God (paragraph 18).

### *A Memorandum for his holy brother, Fortunatian*

1. 1. As I asked when present, I also now exhort you to be so good as to see our brother about whom we were talking in order to ask him to pardon me if in that

letter, which I do not now regret having written, he found anything said to him rather sternly and harshly. For I said that the eyes of this body do not see and will not see God. Of course I added the reason why I said this, namely, so that God himself would not be thought to be bodily and visible in a stretch or area of space. After all, the eye of this body cannot see anything in any other way. And I said it so that the words, *face to face* (1 Cor 13:12), would not be interpreted in the sense that God is limited by the members of a body. Hence, I do not regret having said that; otherwise, we would have so wicked an idea of God himself that we would think that he is not whole everywhere, but divisible in areas of space. Such things we, of course, know with these eyes.

2. On the other hand, inasmuch as I think nothing of the sort about God but believe him to be an immutable and incorporeal spirit who is whole everywhere, if anyone considers that there will be so great a change of this body when it is made a spiritual body from a natural one that we will also be able to see by such a body an incorporeal substance not divisible in areas and stretches of space or limited by the lines and bounds of members, but whole everywhere, I want him to teach me whether he holds the truth. But if he holds a false opinion on this, it is far more tolerable to add something to a body than to take something away from God. And if this opinion is true, it will not be opposed to the words of mine that I put in that letter. For I said that the eyes of this body will not see God, having in mind that the eyes of this body cannot see anything at all but bodies that are apart from our eyes at some spatial distance. For if there were no distance between them, we would not even see bodies by them.

3. But if our bodies will be changed into something so unlike what they are now that they will have eyes by which they will see that substance which is not either spread out or bound by stretches of space, which does not have one part here and another there, a smaller one in a smaller space and a larger one in a larger space, but is everywhere whole in a non-bodily way, these bodies will be something far different and will not be themselves. They will be something else not merely because of the removal of their mortality, corruption, and heavy weight, but they will somehow be transformed into the power of the mind, if they will be able somehow to see in a way in which the mind will then be able to see, but now not even the mind can see. For, if we say that a man is not the man he was after he has changed in his morals, if we even say that a body is not what it was when its age has changed, how much more will the body not be itself if it has been transformed by so great a change that it not only lives immortally but also sees the invisible? Hence, if they see God, the eyes of this body will not see him, because in this respect it will not be the same body if it has been transformed into that power and potency, and this opinion will not be opposed to those words of my letter. If, however, the body will not be the same because it is now mortal and will then be immortal, because it now weighs down the soul and then without any weight will be most agile for any movement, but is the same for seeing those

things that are viewed in stretches and areas of space, it will by no means see an incorporeal substance that is whole everywhere if it is not something other than what it is. Whether this opinion or that one is true, according to both of them it is true that the eyes of this body will not see God. For they will either be the eyes of this body, and they will not see him, or they will not be the eyes of this body if they do see him, because by such a great transformation they will be the eyes of a far different body.

4. If this brother knows something better on this issue, I am ready to learn it either from him or from the one from whom he learned it. But if I were speaking ironically, I would even say that I am prepared to learn that position about a bodily God who is divisible by his members in space. But I do not say that, because I am not speaking ironically, and I have no doubt that God is not like that at all. And I wrote that letter in order that no one would believe that he was like that. Since I was concerned with giving a warning in the letter that I wrote without mentioning any names, I was excessive and imprudent in rebuking, and I did not, like a brother and a bishop, bear in mind the person of a brother and bishop, as was fitting. I do not defend this but blame it. I do not excuse this but accuse it. I ask him to forgive, to recall our earlier love and to forget the recent offense. Let him at least do what he is angry that I did not do; let him have a gentleness in granting pardon that I did not have in writing that letter. I ask by means of Your Charity what I wanted to ask when I was present before him if I had the opportunity. I tried this by having a venerable man, one preferable to all of us in honor, write to him, but he refused to come, perhaps having suspected, I suppose, some trick against him, as often happens in human affairs. Make him believe, to the extent you can, that I am far from behaving like that, for as someone present you can do so more easily. Tell him of the great and true sorrow of which I spoke with you about the offense to his feelings. Make him realize that I do not hold him in contempt and how much I revere God in him and bear in mind our head in whose body we are brothers. I thought that I should not go to his place of residence for fear that we might produce a spectacle to be laughed at by others, to be deplored by our friends, and to be ashamed of by us. By means of Your Holiness and Charity the whole situation can be handled correctly; God, of course, handles it, who dwells by his faith in your heart, and I believe that our brother does not hold the Lord in contempt in you since he recognizes him in himself.

5. I at least have not found anything better to do in this case than to ask pardon from a brother who has complained that he was injured by the harshness of my letter. And he himself will do, I hope, what he knows is commanded by him who speaks through the apostle. He says, *Pardon one another if one of you has a complaint against another, just as God has pardoned you in Christ (Col 3:13). Be imitators, then, of God, like most beloved children, and walk in love, as Christ has also loved us (Eph 5:1).* Walking in this love with greater care, if we can, let

us with oneness of heart investigate the spiritual body that we will have in the resurrection. For, even if we should have some other ideas, God will also reveal this to us, if we remain in him.<sup>1</sup> But one who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him, because God is love<sup>2</sup> either because he exists like its ineffable fountain or because he bestows it on us through his Spirit. If, then, one can show that love will at some time be seen by bodily eyes, God will perhaps also be seen. But if love will never be seen, much less will its fountain be seen or anything else more excellent and more fitting that can be said about it.

2. 6. Certain great men who are also most learned in the holy scriptures, who have by their writings greatly helped the Church and the sound studies of the faithful, when they were given the opportunity, have said that the invisible God is seen in an invisible way, that is, by that nature that is also invisible in us, namely, by a clean mind or heart. When blessed Ambrose was dealing with Christ insofar as he is the Word, he said, "Jesus is seen, after all, not with bodily but with spiritual eyes." And a little later he said, "The Jews did not see him, for their foolish heart was blinded,"<sup>3</sup> here showing how he might be seen. Likewise, when he was speaking of the Holy Spirit, he inserted the words of the Lord where he said, *I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another comforter who will be with you for eternity, the Spirit of truth, whom this world cannot receive, because it does not see him or know him* (Jn 14:16-17). Ambrose said, "It was right that he showed himself in the body, because in the substance of the divinity he is not seen. We saw the Spirit but in bodily form; let us also see the Father. But because we cannot see him, let us listen."<sup>4</sup> And shortly afterwards he said, "Let us, then, listen to the Father. For the Father is invisible, but the Son too is invisible in terms of the divinity. *For no one has ever seen God* (1 Jn 4:12); since, then, the Son is God, the Son is not seen inasmuch as he is God."<sup>5</sup>

7. The saintly Jerome, however, says, "The eye of a human being is not able to see God as he is in his nature—not only a human being, but neither the angels, nor the thrones, nor the powers, nor the dominations, nor anything, whatever it is called. For no creature can look upon its creator."<sup>6</sup> With these words the most learned man showed well enough what he held concerning the world to come insofar as it pertains to our question. For, however much the eyes of our body may be improved, they will be equal to the angels. But Jerome said that the nature of the creator is invisible for them and for absolutely all the heavenly creation. Or if a question is raised on this point as well and any doubt is intro-

1. See Phil 3:15.

2. See 1 Jn 4:16.

3. Ambrose, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke (Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam)* I, 5-6: PL 15, 1535.

4. *Ibid.* II, 93-94: PL 15, 1587.

5. *Ibid.* II, 94: PL 15, 1587.

6. See Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah (Commentarium in Isaiam)* III, 1: PL 24, 93.

duced about whether we will not be better than the angels, there is the clear statement of the Lord on this where he said about those who will rise for the kingdom: *They will be equal to the angels of God* (Lk 20:36, Mt 22:30, and Mk 12:35). On this the same saintly Jerome speaks elsewhere in this way: "A human being, therefore, cannot see the face of God. The angels, however, even of the least persons in the Church always see the face of God.<sup>7</sup> And we see now in a glass, obscurely, but then we shall see *face to face* (1 Cor 13:12), when we shall progress from human beings into angels and shall be able to say with the apostle, *But as we gaze upon the glory of the Lord with face unveiled, we will all be transformed into the same image of him from one glory to another glory as if by the Spirit of the Lord* (2 Cor 3:18), though no creature sees the face of God in accord with the character of his nature, and he is then seen by the mind, since he is believed to be invisible."<sup>8</sup>

8. In these words of the man of God there are many points to consider: first, that in accord with the plainest statement of the Lord he too holds that we will then see the face of God when we shall progress into angels, that is, when we will become equal to the angels, something that will, of course, come about at the resurrection of the dead. Next, from the testimony of the apostle it is quite clear that we should understand the face not of the outer self but of the inner self when we shall see face to face; the apostle was, of course, speaking of the face of the heart when he said what I quoted on this: *But as we gaze upon the glory of the Lord with face unveiled, we will all be transformed into the same image of him* (2 Cor 3:18). If anyone doubts this, let him reconsider the same passage and notice what the apostle was speaking about, namely, the veil that remains in the reading of the Old Testament<sup>9</sup> until each person passes over to Christ in order that the veil may be removed. He, of course, says there: *But as we gaze upon the glory of the Lord with face unveiled*, and this face was not unveiled in the Jews of whom he says, *A veil was placed over their heart* (2 Cor 3:15), in order to show that the face of the heart has been revealed for us since the veil has been removed. Finally, so that no one less attentive to these points and with less discernment should believe that God either now is or will be visible either to the angels or to human beings when we shall have been made equal to the angels, he most clearly expressed what he held when he said, "No creature sees the face of God in accord with the character of his nature, and he is then seen by the mind, since he is believed to be invisible."<sup>10</sup> Hence, he sufficiently indicated that, when he was seen by human beings through the eyes of the body, as if he himself were bodily, he was not seen according to the proper character of his nature, in which he is

7. See Mt 18:10.

8. Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah* (*Commentarium in Isaiam*) I, 10: PL 24, 33.

9. See Ex 34:33-35.

10. Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah* (*Commentarium in Isaiam*) I, 10: PL 24, 33.



seen by the mind since he is believed to be invisible. Invisible to what but to the bodily gazes, even heavenly ones, as he said above concerning the angels and powers and dominations? How much more is he invisible to earthly gazes!

9. Hence, in another passage he says more clearly, "The eyes of the flesh are unable to see not only the divinity of the Father but also that of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, because there is one nature in the Trinity, but the eyes of the mind can. Of these eyes the savior himself says, *Blessed are the clean of heart because they shall see God*" (Mt 5:8).<sup>11</sup> What could be clearer than this explanation? If he had only said: "The eyes of the flesh are unable to see not only the divinity of the Father but also that of the Son and the Holy Spirit," and did not then add, "but the eyes of the mind can," it would perhaps be said that the body should no longer be called flesh once it is spiritual. By going on, then, to say, "but the eyes of the mind can," he removed this sort of vision from every kind of body. But lest anyone should suppose that he was speaking only of the present time, he also added the testimony of the Lord, since he wanted to show which eyes of the mind he meant. That testimony states the promise not of a present but of a future vision: *Blessed are the clean of heart because they shall see God*.

10. When the most blessed Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria, was opposing the Arians who say that only God the Father is invisible but think that the Son and the Holy Spirit are visible, he also defended the equal invisibility of the Trinity by the testimonies of the holy scriptures and the carefulness of his arguments. He most persistently argued that God is seen only because of his assuming a creature, but according to the proper character of his godhead God is absolutely invisible, that is, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, except insofar as it can be known by the mind and spirit.<sup>12</sup> Saint Gregory, an Eastern bishop, says most clearly that God, that is, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, is invisible by nature when he appeared to the patriarchs, just as he could have been seen by Moses with whom he spoke face to face, by assuming the disposition of some visible matter, while his invisibility remains unimpaired.<sup>13</sup> This is what our Ambrose also says, namely, that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit were seen in the form that their will chose, not in that which was proper to their nature,<sup>14</sup> so that it is true that *no one ever saw God* (Jn 1:18 and 1 Jn 4:12), which are the words of Christ the Lord himself, and that *no human being has seen him or can see him* (1 Tm 6:16), which are the words of the

11. Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah (Commentarium in Isaiam)* III, 6, verse 1: PL 24, 93.

12. Athanasius, *Sermons against the Arians (Orationes adversus Arianos)* 1, 63; 3, 14, and 4, 36: PG 26, 144 and 352 and PG 41, 525.

13. Phoebatus, *The Divinity and Consubstantiality of the Son (De filii divinitate et consubstantiali)* 8: PL 20, 46-47. Though Augustine attributes the work to Gregory, an Eastern bishop, the work was included among the writings of Gregory of Elvira; it is now attributed to Phoebatus of Agen.

14. Ambrose, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke (Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam)* 1, 11: PL 15, 1543.

apostle; in fact, they are the words of Christ through the apostle. And those testimonies of the scriptures that tell of God's being seen are not rejected, because he is both invisible by the proper nature of his godhead and can be seen when he wills by the assumption of a creature, as he chooses.

3. 11. But if invisibility belongs to his nature, just as incorruptibility does, that nature will not be changed in the world to come so that from being invisible it becomes visible. For it could not become corruptible from being incorruptible either. For he is at the same time immutable. And it was, of course, his nature that the apostle emphasized when he put these two together in saying, *To the king of the ages, invisible and incorruptible, the only God, honor and glory forever and ever* (1 Tm 1:17). Hence, I do not dare to distinguish them in such a way as to say: He is incorruptible forever and ever, but not invisible forever and ever, but only in this age. Because these testimonies cannot be false: *Blessed are the clean of heart because they shall see God* (Mt 5:8), and, *We know that, when he appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is* (1 Jn 3:2), we cannot deny that the children of God will see God. But they will see him in the way that invisible things are seen, in the way he promised that he would reveal himself who was seen by human beings as visible in the flesh when he said, *And I shall love him and reveal myself to him* (Jn 14:21), who was speaking in plain sight before the eyes of human beings. How are invisible things seen but by the eyes of the heart? Of these I said a little before what Jerome understood by seeing God.

12. This is also the reason why the previously mentioned bishop of Milan said that in the resurrection it will not be easy to see God except for those who are clean of heart and that for this reason scripture says, *Blessed are the clean of heart because they shall see God* (Mt 5:8). "How many he declared blessed, and yet he did not promise these the ability to see God!" And then he added the words, "If, then, those who are clean of heart will see God, the others, of course, will not see him." And so that we would not understand those others to be those of whom he said, *Blessed are the poor; blessed are the meek*, he immediately added, "After all, the unworthy will not see God." He, of course, wanted us to understand that the unworthy are those who, though they will rise, will not be able to see God because they will rise for condemnation, since they refused to make their heart clean by the true faith that works through love.<sup>15</sup> And so he goes on and says, "Nor can someone see God who has not wanted to see God." Then, because it came to mind that even the wicked all want to see God, he immediately added in order to show why he said, "Someone who has not wanted to see God," that a wicked person, of course, does not want to see God in that way, because he does not want to make his heart clean in order that he might be able to see God with it. He said, "Nor is God seen in a location, but by a clean heart. God

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15. See Gal 5:6.

is not sought by bodily eyes, nor enveloped by sight, nor held by touch, nor heard by words, nor perceived by his walk.”<sup>16</sup> By these words, blessed Ambrose wanted to warn human beings about what they ought to prepare if they want to see God, that is, they ought to make their heart clean by the faith that works through love by the gift of the Holy Spirit, from whom we have a pledge by which we might come to know how to desire that vision.<sup>17</sup>

4, 13. For scripture often mentions the members of God, but in order that no one would believe that we are like God in terms of the form and shape of this flesh, that same scripture said that God had wings,<sup>18</sup> which we, of course, do not have. Just as when we hear “wings,” we think of his protection, so when we hear “hands,” we ought also to understand his working. And when we hear “feet,” we ought to understand his coming, and when we hear “eyes,” we ought to understand the vision by which he knows. And when we hear “face,” we ought to understand the knowledge by which he makes himself known. And whatever else of the sort that the same scripture mentions should, I think, be understood spiritually. Nor do I alone think this, nor am I the first, but all those do who resist by spiritual understanding those who are called anthropomorphites. I do not want to cause greater delays by mentioning many passages from their writings; I introduce only this one from the saintly Jerome in order that this brother may know that he should not argue about this issue with me rather than with earlier men, if anything inclines him against this.

14. When that man most learned in the scriptures explained the psalm where it says, *Understand, therefore, you who are foolish among the people, and be wise at last, you fools. Will he who made the ear not hear, or will he who fashioned the eye not see?* (Ps 94:9), he said among other things, “This passage is especially opposed to the anthropomorphites,<sup>19</sup> who say that God has the same members we have. For example, God is said to have eyes because the eyes of God see all things. The hands of the Lord do all things. Scripture says, *And Adam heard the sound of the Lord's feet as he walked in paradise* (Gn 3:8). These people understand these passages in a literal sense and refer these human frailties to the magnificence of God. I, however, say that God is wholly an eye; he is wholly a hand; he is wholly a foot. He is wholly an eye because he sees all. He is wholly a hand because he does all things. He is wholly a foot because he is everywhere. See, therefore, what the psalmist says: *Will he who made the ear not hear, or will he who fashioned the eyes not see?* He did not say, ‘He who made the ear, therefore, does not himself have an ear.’ He did not say, ‘He, therefore, does not

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16. Ambrose, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke (Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam)* 1, 27: PL 15, 1554-1555.

17. See 2 Cor 5:4-8.

18. See Ps 16:8.

19. See *Heresies* 50 for the Audians, a sect founded by Audius of Edessa; there were also anthropomorphite monks in Egypt, but they were not Audians.

have eyes.' But what did he say? *Will he who made the ear not hear? Will he who fashioned the eyes not see?* He excluded the members, but gave him their activities."<sup>20</sup>

15. I thought that I should mention all these passages from the writings of both the Latins and the Greeks who, living in the Catholic Church before us, commented on the words of God in order that this brother may know that, if he holds some view differing from these, he should investigate, learn, or teach it with a careful and tranquil consideration, with all bitterness of dissension set aside and with the sweetness of brotherly love preserved and completely restored. After all, we ought not to regard the writings of any people, though Catholic and highly praised, as being on a par with the canonical scriptures, so that we are not permitted—always preserving the respect owed to those men—to criticize and reject something in their writings if we should perhaps find something that they held other than is found in the truth, when understood with the help of God by ourselves or by others. That is the way I am with the writings of others; that is the way I want my readers to be. Finally, in all those passages I mentioned from the works of the saints and teachers, Ambrose, Jerome, Athanasius, Gregory, and any others I was able to read but thought it would take too long to mention, by the help of the Lord I most firmly believe and, to the extent he grants, I understand that God is not a body and does not have the members of the human form, that he is not divisible by parts of space, and that he was seen by those to whom he appeared not through that same nature and substance but by a visible form he assumed as he willed, when the holy scriptures report that he was seen by the eyes of the body.

5. 16. But I confess that I have not yet read anywhere anything that I thought was enough for me for the purpose of learning or teaching concerning the spiritual body that we shall have in the resurrection. How much improvement will the body receive? Will it attain to the simplicity of the spirit so that the whole human being will then be spirit? Or, as I tend to think but do not yet affirm with full confidence, will it be a spiritual body so that it will be said to be spiritual on account of a certain ineffable agility, while it preserves its bodily substance that cannot live and sense by itself but does so by that spirit that uses it? After all, even now the nature of the soul is not the same as the body's because the body is said to be natural.<sup>21</sup> And if the nature of the body, though immortal and incorruptible, will be preserved, will it help the spirit for the purpose of seeing visible, that is, bodily things, just as now we cannot see anything of the sort except through the body? Or will our spirit then be able to know bodily things without

20. Jerome, *Short Commentary on the Psalms (Breviarium in Psalmos)*, Psalm 93:8-9: PL 26, 1108. The author of this work is most probably not Jerome.

21. Augustine uses the Pauline expression "animal body" that in both Latin and Greek is literally "soul body." Just as "soul body" does not mean that the body is changed into the soul, neither does "spiritual body" mean that the body is changed into the spirit.

the organ of the body? After all, God too does not know such things by a sense of the body. And many other issues can puzzle one on this question.

17. And for this reason if my caution of whatever kind it is does not displease this brother, let us in the meanwhile, on account of the words of scripture, *Because we shall see him as he is* (1 Jn 3:2), prepare a clean heart for that vision to the extent we can with his help. Let us, however, peacefully and carefully investigate with regard to the spiritual body in case God should perhaps deign to reveal in accord with his scriptures something certain and clear, if he knows that it is useful for us. For, if a more careful inquiry discovers that the transformation of the body will be so great that it will be able to see invisible things, such a power of the body will not, I think, take from the mind its vision so that the outer self could then see God but the inner self could not, as if God would be only outside in relation to a human being and not inside within him, since scripture says with perfect clarity, *That God may be all things in all things* (1 Cor 15:28). Or will he who is whole everywhere without any stretches of space be inside so that he can only be seen outside by the outer self but cannot be seen inside by the inner self? These ideas are most absurd. Since the saints will be more filled with God, they will not be empty on the inside and surrounded by him on the outside. Nor will they be blind inside and not see him with whom they are filled. Nor will they have eyes only on the outside and see him by whom they are surrounded. It remains that for the present we are most certain about the vision of God in terms of the inner self. But if the body will be able to do this by a wondrous transformation, some new power will be added; the former will not be taken away.

18. We do better, then, to affirm that about which we have no doubt, namely, that the inner self will see God, for now the inner self alone can see love, which scripture praises in saying, *God is love* (1 Jn 4:8). The inner self alone sees peace and holiness, without which no one can see God. After all, no eye of the flesh now sees love, peace, holiness, and any other things like them; still, the eye of the mind now sees all these things more purely, the purer it is. Let us believe without any doubt that we shall see God, whether we discover or do not discover what we are seeking about the quality of the future body. For we do not doubt that the body will rise and will be immortal and incorruptible, because on this we possess perfectly clear and solid statements of the holy scriptures. But if this brother claims that what I am still seeking concerning the spiritual body is already absolutely certain for him, he will have grounds for rightly being angry if I do not calmly listen to him teach, just as he also calmly listens to me ask questions. Now, nonetheless, I beg through Christ that you obtain pardon for me from him for that harshness of my letter by which I have learned that he is not unjustly offended, and that with the help of the Lord you may bring me joy by your reply.

## Letter 149

Toward the end of 416 Augustine wrote to Paulinus, the bishop of Nola, in reply to Letter 121, in order to answer for him a series of questions on the interpretation of various difficult passages of scripture. Augustine first thanks God for the good news he has received from Paulinus' letter and expresses regret that Paulinus did not receive certain other letters, of which Augustine now sends him copies (paragraphs 1 and 2). Then Augustine turns to a series of questions on the meaning of various verses from different psalms (paragraphs 3 to 10).

Augustine next deals with the meaning of various verses from the apostle, such as Ephesians 4:11 (paragraph 11) and 1 Timothy 2:1 (paragraph 12). In the latter verse Paulinus wanted to know the difference between the different sorts of prayer mentioned: entreaties, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving, and Augustine spends several paragraphs distinguishing the terms as they are found in the Greek text and as the terms are used in the liturgy (paragraphs 13 to 16). He also indicates the reason why such prayers are to be made (paragraph 17).

Augustine then turns to Paulinus' question about Romans 11:28 and explains what Paul meant by the blindness of the Jews that was produced until the fullness of the Gentiles had entered (paragraphs 18 and 19). He points out that it need not be thought that the same Jews were enemies in terms of the gospel and beloved in terms of their election (paragraph 20) and asserts that only the elect who have been called according to God's plan belong to the predestined (paragraph 21). Though God's judgments may be hidden, they can never be unjust (paragraph 22).

Augustine next considers the apostle's words in Colossians 2, specifically his words, *Do not handle; do not taste; do not touch* (Col 2:21), which he argues were said with irony (paragraph 23), and then proceeds to set them within the context of the whole chapter, doing an exegesis of the chapter verse by verse both before and after verse 21 (paragraphs 24 to 30).

Finally, Augustine takes up a series of questions on the gospel, first, regarding why some did not recognize Christ after the resurrection (paragraph 31), then, about the words the risen Christ spoke to Mary Magdalene at the tomb (paragraph 32), and about the words of Simeon to the Virgin Mary in the temple (paragraph 33). He brings the letter to a close with greetings and commends a monk also called Paulinus to Paulinus of Nola.

*To his most blessed and venerably dear and dearly venerable brother and fellow bishop, Paulinus, who is holy and most beloved to us in a holy way, Augustine sends greetings in the Lord.*

1. We give thanks to God, who comforts the afflicted and consoles the humble,<sup>1</sup> because the Lord has quickly brought us joy by the reports of the letter of Your Holiness about the successful arrival of our brother and fellow priest, Quintus, and of those who sailed with him. Now by the opportunity furnished by our son and fellow deacon, Rufinus, which was the next opportunity we had, I am writing in reply. For he left from the port of Hippo. And I approve the counsel of mercy with which the Lord has inspired you and of which you have been so good as to tell me. May God also help this along; may he make it go well who has eased our concern to a large extent, because a man most dear to me has set out, commended not only by good works but also by your holy prayers.

2. The letter of Your Reverence, in which you asked many questions and advised me to investigate them and by asking them taught me, has arrived.<sup>2</sup> But the letter that I immediately wrote back by the intermediary of those same holy men, who are our consolation, was not, as I found out from this more recent letter of yours, delivered to Your Reverence. I was not able to recall the extent to which I replied in it to your questions, nor did I find a copy in which I might be able to find this out when I looked for one. I am, nonetheless, absolutely certain that I replied to some of them and not to all of them, because the courier's haste was pressing me to finish. Along with it I had sent, as you directed, a copy of that letter that I had written to Your Charity at Carthage on the resurrection of the body, in which the question arose about the use of our members.<sup>3</sup> Now, therefore, I sent this copy and another of another letter since I suspected that it too did not come into your hands, because you have again asked me certain questions that I find and recognize in it that I have already answered. But I do not know by whom I sent it. As the letter also indicates, the writings of Your Charity, to which I replied by my letter, were sent to me by our brothers from Hippo, since I was staying with our holy brother and fellow bishop, Boniface (for I did not see its bearer), and I did not put off an immediate reply.

3. Because at that time, as I wrote, I had not been able to look at the Greek manuscripts on account of certain verses of Psalm Sixteen, I later looked at those I found. And one of them had what our Latin books have: *Lord, removing them from the land, scatter them* (Ps 17:14). Another has, as you quoted: *From the few from the land*. And the meaning of the former is, of course, clear: *Removing them from the land* that you gave them, *scatter them* among the nations, and this took

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1. See 2 Cor 7:6.

2. See Letter 121.

3. See Letter 95.

place when they were defeated and wiped out in a terrible war.<sup>4</sup> But I have no idea how the other version should be interpreted, unless in comparison with the great number of them who were lost a remnant was saved, namely, among the few from whom scripture foretold they were going to be scattered, that is, divided and separated. It said: *O Lord, from the few*, that is, from the remnant that you made from that people, *scatter them from the land*, where we understand the land to be the Church and the heritage of believers and saints, which is called the land of the living.<sup>5</sup> We can also correctly understand this from that passage: *Blessed are the meek because they shall possess the land as their heritage* (Mt 5:4). But after it said, *From the few divide them from the land*, it added, *in their life*, in order that it would be clearly understood that this will be while they live this life. For many are separated from the Church, but only when they die, for when they are living they seem to be united to the Church by sharing in the sacraments and in the Catholic unity. These, then, have been divided from the few who came to believe from among them from the land that the Father, like a farmer, cultivates like his own field.<sup>6</sup> They have, however, been divided in this life, that is, here in a clear manner, as we now see. There follows, however: *And their belly has been filled from your secrets*. That is, besides the fact that they have been clearly divided, *their belly has been filled even from your secrets*, which you secretly repay to the conscience of the wicked. The psalmist used “belly” for the secret places of what is internal and hidden.

4. But I have already said what I thought about the next words, *They have been sated with pork*. But the reading of the other manuscripts, which are regarded as more accurate because the more careful copies remove the ambiguity by the accent mark on this same Greek word in the Greek way of writing,<sup>7</sup> is, of course, more obscure, but it seems to fit better with a preferable meaning. For, since it said, *And their belly has been filled from your secrets*, which words signified the hidden judgments of God, those people are wretched in a hidden way, even if they are happy in their sins, since God has abandoned them to the desires of their heart.<sup>8</sup> And as if the psalmist were asked how they could be known who are filled with the wrath of God in secret, and as if he gave the answer found in the gospel, *From their fruits you will know them* (Mt 7:16), there was immediately added, *They were sated with their children*, that is with their fruits, and it is expressed more clearly as: “with their works.” For this reason we read elsewhere: *See, he brought to birth injustice; he conceived pain and bore iniquity* (Ps 8:15), and elsewhere: *Then, after it has conceived, concupiscence*

4. Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D.

5. See Ps 27:13, Ps 142:6, Is 38:11, Is 53:8, and Jer 11:19.

6. See Jn 15:1.

7. That is, in some manuscripts there is found: *βιῶν*: children; in others: *βῶν*: pigs or *θειῶν*: pork. The difference is not due to accent marks, but to the vowels.

8. See Rom 1:24.



*begets sin* (Jas 1:15). Bad children, then, are the bad actions by which they are known who have been filled as if in the belly of their own thoughts by the hidden judgments of God. Good children are good works. Hence, he says to the Church, his spouse, *Your teeth are like a flock of shorn sheep climbing out of the bath; all of them produce twins, and none of them is sterile* (Sg 4:2). In the twin offspring the twofold work of love is seen, namely, of the Lord God and of the neighbor, on which two commandments the whole law and the prophets depend.<sup>9</sup>

5. This interpretation, however, by which the words, *They were sated with their children*, are explained had not occurred to me when I wrote to you before, but I reexamined a very brief explanation of the same psalm that I had long ago dictated, and I found that I had quite briefly said this. I also examined the Greek manuscripts to see whether “children” was in the dative case or the genitive, which that language uses in place of the ablative, and I found the genitive. If this were translated word for word, it would read: *They were sated of their children*. But the translator correctly followed the sense and said in the Latin way: *They were sated with their children*. But with regard to what follows, *And they left the remnants for their little ones*, I think that we should understand the little ones as the obvious children of the flesh. Hence, even according to this explanation, not about pork but about children, the sense remains the same as that by which they said: *His blood be upon us and upon our children* (Mt 27:25). For in that way they left the remainder of their work to their little ones.

6. But in Psalm Fifteen it says, *He has made marvelous*, or, *Let him make marvelous all his desires among them* (Ps 16:3). Nothing prevents us from understanding not “among them” but “in them”; in fact, it seems better to do so. For the Greek manuscripts have it that way. But our people often translate “in them,” which that language has as “among them.” Let us take it, then, as follows: *For the holy ones who are in his land, he has made marvelous all his desires in them*, which most manuscripts have. And let us understand, *all his desires*, as the gifts of grace that are given freely, that is, because he wanted to, not because they were owed. Hence it says, *With the shield of your goodwill you have crowned us* (Ps 6:13), and, *Willingly he begot us by the word of truth* (Jas 1:18), and, *You set aside a free rain, O God, for your heritage* (Ps 68:10), and, *Apportioning to each one his gifts as he wants* (1 Cor 12:11), and countless others. Hence, *He made marvelous all his desires in them*. In whom but in *the holy ones in his land*? If “land” can, as we showed above, be taken in a good sense, even where “his” is not added,<sup>10</sup> how much more can it be where it says: *his land*! He made, therefore, all his desires marvelous in them; he made his desires absolutely marvelous, because he set them free in a marvelous way from despair.

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9. See Mt 22:40.

10. See above 1, 3, where it stands for the Church.

7. As a result of that admiration the apostle cried out, *O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!* (Rom 11:33). He had, of course, said above: *For God enclosed all in unbelief in order that he might show mercy to all* (Rom 11:32). For this also follows here: *Their infirmities were made many; afterward they hurried* (Ps 16:4). He used “infirmities” instead of “sins,” just as the apostle says to the Romans, *For if, when we were infirm, Christ died for sinners at the appointed time* (Rom 5:6). He calls the same people infirm whom he calls sinners. Then shortly after this sentence, he says in repetition, *God proves his love for us, because, when we were still sinners, Christ died for us* (Rom 5:8). Those whom he called infirm above, he here called sinners. So too, in the following verses he says the same things in other words: *For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son* (Rom 5:10). And for this reason in the verse that says, *Their infirmities were made many*, we understand that their sins were made many. For the law entered in order that sin might abound. But since where sin abounded grace was even more abundant,<sup>11</sup> for this reason *afterwards they hurried*. For he did not come to call the righteous, but sinners,<sup>12</sup> since *it is not those in good health, but the sick who need a doctor* (Mt 9:12), that is, those whose infirmities were made many in order that the medicine of so great a grace might be needed for healing them and in order that one who is forgiven many sins may love much.<sup>13</sup>

8. The ashes of a cow and the sprinkling of blood and the multiplication of victims signified this but did not bring it about. For this reason it goes on to say, *I will not gather their assemblies for the sake of blood* (Ps 16:4), that is, for the sake of the sacrifices that were immolated as a symbol of the blood of Christ. *Nor will I be mindful of their names with my lips*. Their names signified a multitude of infirmities: fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, the effeminate, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, robbers, drunks, revilers, and all those who will not possess the kingdom of God.<sup>14</sup> But where, because sin abounded, grace was even more abundant,<sup>15</sup> *afterwards they hurried*. They were indeed these things, but they were washed; they were made holy; they were made righteous in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.<sup>16</sup> For this reason he will not be mindful of their names with his lips.<sup>17</sup> The more correct manuscripts and those of greater authority do not have “his own desires” but “my desires.” This is just as good since it is said in the person of the Son. It is he, of course, who speaks as those words clearly show that the apostle also used: *You will not leave my soul in*

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11. See Rom 5:20.

12. See Mt 9:13.

13. See Lk 7:47.

14. See 1 Cor 6:9-10.

15. See Rom 5:22.

16. See 1 Cor 6:11.

17. See Ps 16:4.

*the underworld, nor will you allow your holy one to see corruption (Ps 15:10).*<sup>18</sup> The gifts of grace of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit are, of course, the same, and for this reason the Son also can say: *His own desires.*

9. But in Psalm Fifty-Eight it says, *Do not kill them lest they forget your law (Ps 59:12)*; this is understood of the Jews. It seems to me that this can be suitably understood to have been a prediction that the same people even when conquered and defeated, would not give in to the superstitions of the conquering people but would abide by the old law in order that in that law there might be found the testimony of scriptures in the whole world, from which the Church was going to be called. For the Gentiles are shown by no more evident proof than this a fact that they notice for their salvation, namely, that it was not something unexpected and unforeseen initiated by the spirit of human presumption that the name of Christ enjoys such great authority in terms of the hope of salvation, but this was foretold and written down long ago. For what else would they think but that our people made up the prophecy if it were not proven from the manuscripts of our enemies? And so, *do not kill them*, lest the name of this people be wiped out, *in order that they may not forget your law*, something that would happen if, when they were compelled to observe fully the rites and sacrifices of the pagans, they did not retain any mention of their own religion. As a symbol of them scripture says of Cain that the Lord put on him a mark so that no one would kill him.<sup>19</sup> Next, after the psalmist had said, *Do not kill them so that they do not forget your law*, as if he were asked what should be done with them in order that they might not be killed, that is, in order that they might not become extinct and might not forget the law, but might be of service in testimony to the truth, he immediately added, *Scatter them by means of your power (Ps 59:12)*. For, if they were in one place on the earth, they would not by their testimony help the preaching of the gospel, which bears fruit in the whole world. For this reason, *Scatter them by means of your power*, in order that by the law, which they do not forget, they may be witnesses everywhere to him whom they denied, persecuted, and killed. For that law foretold the one whom they do not follow. Nor, after all, does it do them any good that they do not forget it; it is one thing to have the law of God in one's memory and another to have it in one's intellect and actions.

10. In Psalm Sixty-Seven, however, you ask about what this means: *God, nonetheless, will crush the heads of his enemies, the top of the hair of those who walk in their sins (Ps 68:22)*. I do not think that it means anything but that God will crush the heads of his enemies, of those who are excessively proud, of those who are too exalted in their sins. By hyperbole he of course signified pride that is so exalted and walks in such elation, as if one were treading upon the top of a hair in walking. So too, the words in the same psalm, *The tongue of your dogs*

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18. See Acts 2:31 and 13:35.

19. See Gn 4:15.

[comes] from enemies by him (Ps 68:24).<sup>20</sup> Dogs are not always to be taken in the bad sense. Otherwise, the prophet would not criticize the silent dogs that do not know how to bark and love to sleep.<sup>21</sup> For the dogs would certainly be praiseworthy if they knew how to bark and liked to keep watch. And certainly those three hundred—those who lapped up water like dogs<sup>22</sup>—who were designated by that most sacred number signifying the cross,<sup>23</sup> would not be chosen to bring about victory if they did not signify something important. For good dogs keep watch and bark in defense of the house, the master, the flock, and the shepherd. Finally, this is also expressed in praises of the Church as prophecy; the tongues, not the teeth, of the dogs are mentioned. But *your dogs*, it said, come *from your enemies*; that is, in order that those who were your enemies may become your dogs and that those who raged against you may bark in your defense. But he added: *By him*, that is, in order that they might understand that this was not done by themselves, but by him, that is, by his mercy and grace.

2. 11. I understand the apostle's words regarding the prophets, *God made certain persons in the Church apostles, but certain others prophets* (Eph 4:11), in the same way as you yourself wrote, namely, that those were called prophets in this passage whose number included Agabus,<sup>24</sup> not those who foretold that the Lord would come in the flesh. But we find evangelists who were not apostles, for example Mark and Luke. I, however, think that shepherds and teachers, whom you especially wanted me to distinguish, are the same, just as you thought, so that we do not understand that some are shepherds and others teachers. But, after he had first said shepherds, he added teachers in order that shepherds would understand that teaching pertains to their office. For this reason he does not say: "But certain persons shepherds and certain others teachers," though he had distinguished the previous kinds of persons by this sort of language when he said: *Certain persons apostles, but certain others prophets, and certain others evangelists*. Rather he included this like a single office under two names: *But certain others pastors and teachers*.

12. It is clearly difficult to distinguish those terms where in writing to Timothy he says: *I beg you, therefore, first of all that entreaties, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving be made* (1 Tm 2:1). They must be distinguished in terms of the Greek language, for it is hard to find our translators who have taken care to translate them with diligence and knowledge. For, look, the apostle who of course wrote that letter in Greek did not express both of these by the same word as you quoted it:

20. Augustine's Latin is a word for word translation of the Septuagint: ἡ γλώσσα τῶν κυνῶν σου ἐξῆρών παρ' αὐτοῦ.

21. See Is 56:10.

22. See Jgs 7:7.

23. The Greek letter tau has the shape of a cross and is the sign for the number 300. Gideon had only 300 warriors, those who lapped up water like dogs, to deliver Israel from the Medianites.

24. See Acts 11:27-28.

*I beg (obsecro) that entreaties (obsecrationes) be made.* But instead of the Latin, *obsecro*, he said in Greek: παρακαλῶ (I urge). But for *obsecrationes*, which our Latin has, he used: δεήσεις (petitions). Hence, other manuscripts, including ours, do not have “entreaties,” but “petitions.” Most Latin manuscripts have the following three terms in this way: *prayers, intercessions, thanksgiving.*

13. Hence, if we want to distinguish these terms according to the proper meanings in the manner of speaking the Latin language, we will perhaps hold our view or some other, but it would be surprising if we got the sense for the Greek language or usage. Many of ours think that “prayer (*precatio*)” and “deprecation (*deprecatio*)” are the same, and this has absolutely prevailed in our daily usage. But those who have spoken Latin with more precision use “prayers” for desiring good things, but “deprecations” for avoiding evils. For they said “to pray (*precari*)” is to desire good things by praying, but “to imprecate (*imprecari*),” which is commonly said, is to curse, while “to deprecate (*deprecari*)” is to ward off evils by praying. Let us rather follow the usual manner of speaking and, whether we find “prayers” or “petitions,” which the Greeks call δεήσεις, let us not suppose that it should be corrected. But it is very difficult to distinguish “orations,” which in Greek is προσευχάς, from “prayers” and “petitions.” But certain manuscripts do not have “orations” but “adorations,” because in Greek it did not say εὐχάς but προσευχάς. I do not think that this was translated wisely. For it is very well known that for “orations” the Greeks use προσευχάι. And to pray is something other than to adore. Finally, we do not find this verb but another in Greek, where it says, *You shall adore the Lord your God* (Mt 4:10), and, *I will adore at your holy temple* (Ps 5:8).

14. But instead of “intercessions,” which our manuscripts have, you put “petitions” in accord with your manuscripts, I believe. Regarding these two words, that is, which some translated as “petitions” and others as “intercessions,” they wanted to translate the one word that the Greek has: ἐντεύξεις. And you certainly notice and know that to intercede is different than to petition. For we do not usually say: “They intercede in order to petition,” but: “They petition in order to intercede.” Nonetheless, a word used because of the closeness of its meaning, which gets its meaning from this nearness, should not be blamed as an error. For scripture even said of our Lord Jesus Christ that *he intercedes on our behalf* (Rom 8:34 and Heb 7:25). Does he intercede and not also petition? On the contrary, precisely because he petitions, “intercedes” was used in its place. It is clearly said of him in another passage: *And if anyone sins, we have an advocate before the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one, and he is the intercession on behalf of our sins* (1 Jn 2:1-2). Although the manuscripts that you have perhaps do not say in that place: *He intercedes on our behalf*, but: *He petitions on our behalf*, in the Greek, because of which “intercessions” was used here, where you quoted: “petitions,” it is the same verb as where scripture says: *He intercedes on our behalf.*

15. Since, then, one who beseeches prays and one who prays beseeches and one who intercedes with God intercedes in order to pray and to beseech, what does it mean that the apostle used these words in such a way that we ought not to neglect this distinction? If you leave aside the general meaning and keep the customary way of speaking, whether you say “beseech,” “pray,” “intercede,” or “petition,” one and the same action is understood. But we should look for some particular meaning for each of these individual acts. It is, however, difficult to come to that meaning clearly. Many things can, of course, be said here that should not be criticized.

16. But I choose to understand in these words what the whole or almost the whole Church usually understands, and thus we take *precationes* as those prayers which we make in the celebration of the sacraments before we begin to bless the offerings on the Lord’s table. We take *orationes* to be those prayers said when the offerings are blessed and sanctified and broken for distribution, and almost every Church concludes this whole prayer with the Lord’s Prayer. The origin of the Greek word also helps us for understanding this. For scripture rarely uses what they call *εὐχή* in order to express “prayer.” But usually and much more frequently it calls a vow *εὐχή* but it always called prayer *προσευχή*, which is the word used in the passage we are dealing with. For this reason some less learned people looked to the origin of this word and wanted to say that it was not prayer (*oratio*), but adoration (*adoratio*), which is rather said to be *προσκύνησις*. But since prayer (*oratio*) is at times called *εὐχή*, adoration was thought to be *προσευχή*. But if, as I said, a vow is called *εὐχή* in the scripture, apart from the general term for prayer, that is called prayer in the proper sense which we make by a vow, that is, *πρὸς εὐχήν*. For everything we offer to God, especially the sacrifice of the altar, is offered as a vow. That sacrament declares that greatest vow of ours by which we vow that we will remain in Christ, that is, in the unity of the body of Christ. It is a sacred sign of the reality that we are one bread, one body.<sup>25</sup> And so I think that the apostle commanded that in preparation for this sanctification we make *προσευχάι*, that is, prayers or, as some have translated less learnedly: “adorations.” For this means “as a vow,” which is more usually called *εὐχή* in scripture. “Intercessions,” however, or “petitions,” as your manuscripts have, are made when the people are blessed. For then the bishops, like defense lawyers, offer to God’s most merciful power those under their protection by the imposition of hands. After they have done this and have partaken of the sacrament, everything is ended with the thanksgiving, which the apostle also emphasized with these last words.

17. But the main reason for saying these things was that, after he briefly marked off and indicated these forms of prayer, we would not think that we should neglect what follows: *for all human beings, for kings and those in a lofty*

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25. See 1 Cor 10:17.

position, in order that we might lead a quiet and peaceful life in all piety and love (1 Tm 2:1). Otherwise someone might think, given the weakness of the human mind, that we should not make these prayers for those from whom the Church suffers persecution, since the members of Christ are to be gathered from every kind of human being. For this reason he says in addition: *For this is good and pleasing in the sight of God, our savior, who wants all human beings to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth* (1 Tm 2:3-4). And lest anyone say that the way of salvation can consist in living a good life and the worship of God without partaking of the body and blood of Christ, he says: *For there is one God and one mediator between God and human beings, the man Jesus Christ* (1 Tm 2:5), in order that his words, *He wants all human beings to be saved*, might be understood in no other sense than that this salvation is offered only through the mediator, not God, who as the Word always existed, but the man Jesus Christ, since the Word became flesh and dwelled among us.<sup>26</sup>

18. Hence, do not let the words of the same apostle about the Jews disturb you. He says, *In terms of the gospel they are enemies on your account, but in terms of the election they are beloved on account of the patriarchs* (Rom 11:28). That depth, of course, of the riches of wisdom and knowledge and those inscrutable judgments of his and his unsearchable ways<sup>27</sup> produce this great awe in believing hearts that do not doubt his wisdom, which stretches from one end to another mightily and arranges all things gently,<sup>28</sup> but do not know why it pleases him that these people are born, grow, and multiply who, though he did not make them evil, he nonetheless foreknew would be evil. For his plan is too deeply hidden by which he makes good use even of the evil for the betterment of the good, revealing the marvels of the omnipotence of his goodness even in this. For just as it is a mark of their wickedness to make bad use of his good works, so it is a mark of his wisdom to make good use of their bad works.

19. The apostle, then, sets forth the depth of this mystery as follows: *In order that you may not be wise in yourselves, I do not want you, brothers and sisters, to be ignorant of this mystery. For blindness has been produced in a part of Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has entered, and in that way all of Israel will be saved* (Rom 11:25). He said, *in a part*, because not all were blinded; after all, there were some from them who came to know Christ. The fullness of the Gentiles enters in these who have been called according to his plan, and in that way all of Israel will be saved, because those who have been called according to his plan both from the Jews and from the Gentiles are the true Israel. Of these the same apostle says, *And over the Israel of God* (Gal 6:16), but he calls the others Israel according to the flesh. He says, *See Israel according to the flesh* (1 Cor

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26. See Jn 1:14.

27. See Rom 11:33.

28. See Wis 8:1.

10:18). Then he inserts the testimony of the prophet: *He will come from Zion to remove and turn aside impiety from Jacob, and this is my testament with them when I shall take away their sins* (Rom 11:26-27 and Is 59:20), not the sins of all the Jews, but of the chosen ones.

20. Here he adds those words that you set forth to be investigated: *They are enemies in terms of the gospel on your account*. The price of our redemption is, of course, the blood of Christ who certainly could be killed only by enemies. This exemplifies that use of the evil for the betterment of the good. Yet by the addition, *But beloved in terms of the election on account of the patriarchs*, he shows that it is not those enemies but the chosen who are beloved. But it is the custom of scripture to speak in this way of a part as if it were the whole. Thus he praised the Corinthians in the first parts of his letter as if all were like that because some of them deserved praise, and later in some passages of the same letter he criticizes them as if all deserved blame on account of certain ones who did. Whoever takes careful note of this custom of the divine scriptures, which is evident in many places through the whole body of these writings, resolves numerous apparent contradictions. The apostle, therefore, calls some people enemies and others beloved, but, because they were in one people, he seems to say that they were the same ones. And yet many even from the enemies who crucified the Lord were converted and were seen to be chosen. They were chosen at the time when they were converted in terms of the beginning of salvation, but in terms of the foreknowledge of God they were not chosen then but before the creation of the world, as the same apostle says, *Because he chose us before the creation of the world* (Eph 1:4). In two ways, then, the same people were enemies who were beloved, either because they were both in one people or because, from enemies raging to the point of shedding Christ's blood, certain of them became beloved according to the election that was hidden in the foreknowledge of God. For to this he added: *On account of the patriarchs*, because it was necessary that the promise made to the patriarchs be fulfilled, as he says near the end of the Letter to the Romans: *For I say that Christ was a minister to the circumcision on account of the truthfulness of God in order to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs. But the Gentiles glorify God because of his mercy* (Rom 15:8-9). In accord with this mercy Paul said: *Enemies on your account*, in the same sense as he said above, *From their sin came the salvation of the Gentiles*.

21. But after he said, *Beloved in terms of the election because of the patriarchs*, he added, *For the gifts and calling of God are without any repentance*. You surely see that he meant those who belong to the number of the predestined. Of them he says in another passage, *We know that for those who love God all things work together to the good, for those who are called according to his plan* (Rom 8:28). For many are called, but few are chosen.<sup>29</sup> But the chosen are those who are called according to his plan. Regarding these the foreknowledge of God

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29. See Mt 22:14.



undoubtedly cannot be deceived. *He foreknew and predestined these to be conformed to the image of his Son in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. But those he predestined he also called (Rom 8:28-29).* This is the calling according to his plan; this is the calling without repentance. *But those he called he also made righteous, and those he made righteous he also glorified. If God is for us, who is against us? (Rom 8:30-31).*

22. They are not included in this calling who, even though they live for some time in the faith that works through love,<sup>30</sup> do not persevere up to the end. And of course they could have been carried off so that malice would not change their mind<sup>31</sup> if they belonged to that predestination and calling that is according to his plan and without repentance. But no one should be so presumptuous and judgmental concerning the hidden sins of others as to say: "They were not taken from this life before they abandoned the faith because they were not living this life faithfully, and the Lord knew this in their hearts, even though they looked otherwise to human beings." What is such a presumptuous person going to say about tiny infants? After receiving the sacrament of Christian grace at that age, they undoubtedly would belong to eternal life and the kingdom of heaven if they immediately departed from this life, but many are allowed to grow up, and some of them become apostates. Why, except that they do not belong to that predestination and the calling according to his plan and without repentance? But the reason why some belong to it and others do not may be hidden but cannot be unjust. After all, is there injustice in God? Heaven forbid!<sup>32</sup> For this too belongs to that profundity of God's judgments that left the apostle as if astonished and amazed. And of course he calls them judgments in order that no one would think that such things happen through either injustice or the thoughtlessness of the agent or because any parts of the ages that God has arranged according to his great wisdom pass by chance and without design.

23. You said that the words in the Letter to the Colossians, *Let no one mislead you by wanting to feign humility (Col 2:18)* and the rest that follow are extremely obscure to you, nor do I myself as yet understand them clearly. I wish that you had asked me this face to face, for, in order to bring out to some degree the meaning that I think I find in these words, I have to use a certain expression of the face and tone of voice that cannot be expressed in writing, and the words become more obscure because they are not, I think, correctly pronounced. For the words of scripture, *Do not handle; do not taste; do not touch (Col 2:21)*, are thought to be like a command of the apostle forbidding us to handle, to taste, and to touch something or other. But, unless I am mistaken amid such great obscurity, it is just the opposite. With irony, in fact, he quoted the words of those by whom he did

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30. See Gal 5:6.

31. See Wis 4:11.

32. See Rom 9:14.

not want the Colossians to be deceived and misled; those people distinguish foods in accord with the worship of the angels, and in that way they judge concerning this world. They say, *Do not handle; do not taste; do not touch*, though all things are clean for the clean,<sup>33</sup> and every creature of God is good,<sup>34</sup> something that he clearly teaches in another passage.<sup>35</sup>

24. Let us look, then, at the whole context of this phrase, for in that way, once we have seen the apostle's intention, we will perhaps grasp his meaning to the extent we can. For he feared that those to whom he writes this are being misled by the shadows of things, under the sweet name of knowledge, and being turned away from the light of the truth which is found in Christ Jesus, our Lord. He saw, however, that this concern for empty or superfluous observances under the guise of wisdom and knowledge, stemming both from the superstition of the Gentiles, especially from those who are called philosophers, and from Judaism, must be avoided. There the shadows of future things had to be removed since Christ, their light, had come. He therefore mentioned and emphasized the great struggle he had for them and for those who were from Laodicea and for all who did not personally know him in order that they might be consoled in their hearts, united in love and in all the riches of the fullness of understanding, in order to know the mystery of God, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.<sup>36</sup> Then he says, *I say this so that no one may deceive you in words with the appearance of truth* (Col 2:4); because they were attracted by the love of the truth, the apostle feared that they would be deceived by the appearance of truth. And for this reason he emphasized that they have in Christ a most sweet treasure, namely, a treasure of wisdom and knowledge, for they could be led into error by the mention and promise of it.

25. The apostle says, *For, even if I am absent in terms of the body, I am present with you in spirit, rejoicing and seeing your discipline and what is lacking in your faith in Christ* (Col 2:5). He was afraid for them because he saw what they still lacked. He says, *Just as you accepted Jesus Christ our Lord, so live in him, rooted in and built upon him and made strong in faith, just as you were taught, abounding in acts of thanksgiving* (Col 2:6). He wants them to be nourished in faith in order that they may be capable of partaking of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, which are hidden in Christ. Otherwise, before they are suited for these, they might be taken in by words that seem true and wander away from the path of truth. Then, more openly showing what he fears for them, he says, *See that no one deceives you through philosophy and empty enticement according to human tradition, according to the elements of the world, and not*

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33. See Ti 1:15.

34. See 1 Tm 4:4.

35. See Rom 14:20.

36. See Col 2:1-3.

according to Christ. For in him dwells all the fullness of divinity in a bodily manner (Col 2:8-9). He says, *In a bodily manner*, because they were being misled by shadows, using a metaphor, just as the term “shadow” in these matters is not used in its proper sense but metaphorically by reason of a certain likeness. He says, *And you have been filled with him who is the head of every principality and power* (Col 2:10). For the superstition of the pagans or the philosophers was misleading them by principalities and powers, proclaiming what they call theology through the elements of this world. But he wanted us to understand that the head of all things is Christ, the principle of all things, just as, when he was asked, *Who are you?* he replied: *The principle, I who am also speaking to you* (Jn 8:25). For all things were made through him, and without him nothing was made.<sup>37</sup> In a wonderful way the apostle, however, wants the Colossians to hold in contempt these so-called wonders when he shows that they had become the body of that head, saying: *And you have been filled with him who is the head of every principality and power.*

26. So that they would not be misled by the shadows of Judaism, he adds: *In whom you have also been circumcised, not by a circumcision made by hand in the removal of part of the body of flesh—or as some manuscripts have: in the removal of a part of the body of sins of the flesh—but in the circumcision of Christ. You have been buried with him in baptism, and you have also risen with him through faith in the act of God who raised him from the dead* (Col 2:12). See how here too he shows them the body of Christ in order that they may hold these things in contempt, clinging to their great head, Jesus Christ, the mediator between God and human beings, and not looking for a false and powerless intermediary by which they might cling to God. He says, *And when you were dead in your sins and in the foreskin of the flesh.* He called the foreskin what is signified by the foreskin, that is, sins of the flesh that we must remove. He says, *He brought you to life along with him, forgiving you all your sins, wiping out the decree of condemnation that was against us and was opposed to us* (Col 2:14). For the law, which entered in, in order that sin might abound, made them guilty. He said, *Taking it from our midst and nailing it to the cross, he stripped himself of the flesh and made an example of the principalities and powers, triumphing over them in himself confidently* (Col 2:15). He made an example not, to be sure, of good but of evil principalities and evil powers, that is, diabolical and demonic ones. He produced an example by them to show that, just as he stripped himself of the flesh, so the Colossians must be stripped of their carnal vices by which they were subject to those principalities and powers.

27. Now pay careful attention to how he introduced that on account of which we have mentioned all this. He says, *Let no one judge you regarding food* (Col

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37. See Jn 1:3.

2:16), as if he said all this because they were being led astray by such observances from the truth that had freed them. In the gospel it says of that truth, *And the truth will set you free* (Jn 8:32), that is, will make you free. He says, *Let no one judge you regarding food or drink or with respect to a feast day or the new moon or the sabbath days, for this is a foreshadowing of what was to come* (Col 2:16-17). This was said on account of Judaism. Next there follows what was said on account of the superstitions of the pagans. He says, *But the body is Christ's. Let no one condemn you*; he says that it is shameful and highly incongruous and foreign to the nobility of your freedom that, though you are the body of Christ, you are led astray by shadows and seem to be proven guilty like sinners if you fail to observe these things. *But the body is Christ's. Let no one condemn you by wanting to feign humility of heart* (Col 2:17-18). Although this was said in Greek, it would sound quite familiar in the Latin usage of the people. For in that way one who pretends to be rich is commonly called a would-be rich man, and one who pretends to be wise is called a would-be wise man,<sup>38</sup> and other expressions of the sort. Hence, this would-be humble man, which is expressed in greater detail as "wanting to be humble," that is, wanting to appear humble, pretending to be humble. This means: wanting to be seen as humble, feigning humility. And he added: *and the cult of the angels*, or as our manuscripts have: *the religion of the angels*, which in Greek is *θησκαία*. He wants us to understand by the angels the principalities that they think should be worshiped by these observances as the rulers of the elements of this world.

28. Let no one, he says, who wants to appear humble of heart in the cult of the angels condemn you since you are the body of Christ. He says, *Teaching what he did not see*, or as certain manuscripts have: *Teaching what he saw*. He either said, *Teaching what he did not see*, because people carry out these practices because of suspicions and suppositions, not because they see that they should do them, or he said, *Teaching what he saw*, that is, thinking them important, because he saw that those practices are observed in certain places by men in whose authority he put his trust, even if an argument was not given. And he thinks that he is someone important because he happens to see the secrets of certain sacred rites. But the fuller meaning is the following: *Teaching what he does not see, vainly puffed up in his carnal mind*. He said that he was puffed up in a surprising way in his carnal mind where he said previously "a would-be humble man." For it happens in strange ways in the human soul that one is more puffed up from false humility than if one is just plain proud. *And not holding onto the head*, where he wants us to understand Christ, *from whom the whole body, joined together and connected, having received nourishment and cohesion, grows into the development God wills. If, then, you have died with Christ to*

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38. Augustine uses *thelodives* and *thelosapiens* and *thelohumilis*, words that are half Greek, but apparently at least the first two were in popular usage.

*the elements of this world, why do you judge as if you were still living in the world?* (Col 2:19-20).

29. Having said this, he inserts the words of those who judge concerning the world on the basis of these supposedly reasonable observances and are puffed up with their vain pretense of humility: *Do not handle; do not taste; do not touch* (Col 2:21). Let us recall what we said previously in order to understand this. For he does not want them to be judged regarding these observances when he says: *Do not handle; do not taste; do not touch; all these things, he says, are destined for corruption by their use* (Col 2:22). All these things, he says, serve more for corruption when one abstains from them through superstition so that a person misuses them, that is, does not use them, *in accord with the precepts and teachings of human beings*. This is clear, but on what follows you have many questions. *These things have the appearance of wisdom in their observance, in humility of the heart and in the affliction of the body*, or as others have translated it: *for not sparing the body, nor in some honor for the satisfaction of the flesh* (Col 2:23). Why, you ask, does he say that these things, which he blames in this way, have the appearance of wisdom?

30. I will say what you yourself can see in the scriptures, namely, that wisdom is often attributed to the positions of this world, and scripture quite explicitly calls it the wisdom of this world. Do not let it bother you that he did not here add: "Of the world." For in another passage where he said: *Where is there a wise man? Where is there a scribe?* (1 Cor 1:20), he did not also add, "Of this world," so as to say: "Where is there a wise man of this world?" And yet, it is understood. And so it is with this "appearance of wisdom." For they say nothing in the observances of such superstition where they do not seem to give a certain appearance of wisdom regarding the elements of this world and the natures of things. For even when he says, *Beware that no one deceives you through philosophy*, he does not say: "Of this world," and what is philosophy in Latin but the pursuit of wisdom? *These things have, he says, the appearance of wisdom*, that is, those things about which they give some explanation in accord with the elements of this world and the principalities and powers. *In their observance, in humility of the heart*, for they do these things so that the heart is humbled by the vice of superstition. *For not sparing the body*, when it is deprived of these foods from which they are forced to abstain. *Nor in some honor for the satisfaction of the flesh*, not because the flesh is more honorably satisfied by this food rather than by that, since only refreshment and sustenance by any food suitable for one's health pertains to what is necessary.

3. 31. Your question about the gospel often causes problems for many people, namely, how after the resurrection, though he rose in the same body, certain persons of both sexes who knew him recognized him and certain others did not. Here it is usually asked first whether something was brought about in his body or

rather in their eyes in order that they could not recognize him. For when we read, *Their eyes were prevented from recognizing him* (Lk 24:16), it seems that a certain impediment for recognizing him was produced in the eyes of those who saw him. But when it clearly says elsewhere, *He appeared to them in another guise* (Mk 16:12), it seems that something was produced in the body itself whose appearance was different, and they were prevented by that impediment; that is, their eyes suffered a delay in recognizing him. But since there are two things in a body by which the appearance of anyone is recognized, the features and color, I wonder about this. Why does it cause problems of recognition for no one that, before the resurrection when he was so transfigured on the mountain that his face became as bright as the sun,<sup>39</sup> he was able to change the color of his body to so great an excellence of brightness and light? But after the resurrection it causes problems that his features were slightly changed so that he could not be recognized and that by the ease of his power he then regained his same color, just as after the resurrection he also got back his same features. For those three disciples before whose eyes he was transfigured on the mountain would not recognize him if he had come to them from elsewhere, but, because they were with him, they held it for certain that it was he. But it was the same body in which he rose. How is this pertinent? After all, the body in which he was transfigured on the mountain was certainly the same as the body he had as a young man and as the body in which he was born, and yet, if someone who knew only the little baby suddenly saw him as a young man, he would certainly not recognize him. Or is the power of God unable to change the features quickly, something that the age of a man can only do over many years?

32. But you know that I understood Christ's words to Mary, *Do not touch me for I have not yet ascended to the Father* (Jn 20:17), just as you did. For he wanted to convey in that way that he asks for a spiritual touch, that is, that an approach with a faith that believes that he is on high with the Father. And as for the fact that he was recognized by those two in the breaking of the bread,<sup>40</sup> no one should doubt that it signifies the sacrament that gathers us together in order to recognize him.

33. Concerning the words of Simeon, where he says to the Virgin, the mother of the Lord, *And a sword shall pierce your soul* (Lk 2:35), I said what I thought in another letter, a copy of which I just sent you. And that is what you also thought among other things. I think that the next words, *In order that the thoughts of many hearts might be laid bare*, ought to be understood in the sense that the Lord's passion revealed the plotting of the Jews and the weakness of the disciples. It is, then, credible that the term "sword" signified the tribulation by which her maternal soul was wounded by the feeling of sorrow. The sword was in the

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39. See Mt 17:2.

40. See Lk 24:30-31.

mouth of his persecutors, of whom the psalm says: *And the sword was in their mouth* (Ps 59:8). They were the sons of men whose teeth were weapons and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword.<sup>41</sup> For I think that the sword that pierced the soul of Joseph<sup>42</sup> stood for severe tribulation; for scripture clearly says: *A sword pierced his soul until his word came about* (Ps 105:18), that is, he was in severe tribulation until what he predicted happened. Because of this he was highly esteemed and was set free from that tribulation. But in order that it would not be attributed to human wisdom that his word came about, that is, that what he predicted happened, holy scripture gives glory to God for it in its usual manner and immediately adds, *The word of the Lord set him ablaze* (Ps 105:19).

34. I answered your questions as well as I could with the help of your prayers and your arguments that you sent. For, when you argue as you ask questions, you both ask with acuteness and teach with humility. It is useful, however, to discover many opinions on the obscure passages of the divine scriptures, which God wanted to be there in order to provide exercise for our minds, when different people have different views, though they are all nonetheless in accord with the teaching of sound faith. You will surely pardon my style since I am in a great hurry in order to catch the courier who has already boarded the ship. I greet in return in this letter our son Paulinus,<sup>43</sup> who is most dear in the love of Christ, and I exhort him in a few words in my rush that he may give as many thanks as he can to the mercy of the Lord. For he knows how to give relief from tribulation, and he has sent Paulinus by a very violent storm into the harbor where you made your way by a calmer sea, though not trusting the sea's calmness, and God gave you to him to take up and nourish his beginnings in the spiritual life. And let all his bones cry out: *O Lord, who is like you?* (Ps 35:10). For he does not read or listen to me with greater benefit as I teach him, converse with him, or set him afire with any exhortation than he looks upon you as you live your life. My brothers and the fellow servants of God with me greet Your Graciousness in return. From the time, however, when our fellow deacon Peregrinus left me along with our holy brother Urbinus, when he went to take up the burden of the episcopacy, he has not returned to Hippo. From their letters and by word of mouth we nonetheless know that they are safe and sound in the name of Christ. We greet with brotherly love our fellow priest Paulinus and all who enjoy your presence in the Lord.

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41. See Ps 57:5.

42. See Gn 39:20.

43. This Paulinus is probably a monk.

## Letter 150

At the end of 413 or the beginning of 414, Augustine wrote to Proba, the widow of Sextus Petronius Probus, and her daughter-in-law, Juliana, the widow of Anicius Hermogenianus Olybrius. Augustine had written Letters 130 and 131 to Proba and dedicated his work, *The Excellence of Widowhood*, to Juliana. He congratulates them on the occasion of the daughter of Juliana, Demiatrias' beginning the life of a consecrated virgin, and he thanks them for the small gift that they sent him.

*To his rightly illustrious and most excellent daughters, Proba and Juliana, who are most worthy of the honor due to ladies, Augustine sends greetings in the Lord.*

You have filled our heart with joy, a joy that is more sweet the more precious it is and that is more gratifying the more prompt it is. Since wherever you are known (and that is everywhere) the swiftest rumor has announced the consecration of a nun from your family, you have anticipated its most swift flight by the more reliable and certain announcement of your letter and you have made us exult over what we know before doubting what we heard. Who could explain in words, who could proclaim with fitting praise how Christ has from the virgin women of your family incomparably greater glory and benefit than the world has from the men who are consuls? For, if it is great and glorious to give the dignity of one's name to the passing years, how much greater and more glorious it is to transcend them by the integrity of one's heart and body! Let a young lady noble by birth and more noble in holiness, therefore, rejoice more because by union with God she will attain a special loftiness in heaven than if by human marriage she would bear lofty children. For the children of Anicius have chosen more generously to bring happiness to so illustrious a family by forgoing marriage than to increase in numbers by bearing children, and by imitating the life of the angels now in the flesh than by increasing the number of mortals in the flesh. It is a richer and more fecund happiness not to become heavy in the belly but to become great in the mind, not to nurse at the breast but to become resplendent in heart, to bear not earthly children in the womb but heavenly children in prayer. Daughters most worthy of the honor due to ladies, enjoy in her what is lacking in yourself, and may she persevere up to the end, clinging to a marriage that has no end. May many handmaids imitate that lady; may those of lowly birth imitate her nobility, and may those lofty in this fragile world imitate her more humble loftiness. And let virgins who desire for themselves the glory of the Anicii choose their holiness instead. For when will they attain that glory, no matter how much they desire it? But if they fully desire this holiness, they will soon have it. May



the right hand of the Most High protect you and keep you safe and happier, most excellent daughters, who are most worthy of the honor due to ladies. I greet with the love of the Lord and with the respect due to your merits the children of Your Holiness, especially the one outstanding in holiness. We have most gratefully received the gift you sent on the occasion of your daughter's taking the veil.

## Letter 151

At the end of 413, Augustine wrote to Caecilian,<sup>1</sup> the new imperial commissioner and successor to Marcellinus, after the hurried execution of Marcellinus and his brother, Apringius, by Caecilian's friend, Marinus. Augustine expresses his pleasure at having received Caecilian's letter, even if Caecilian is annoyed that Augustine did not write (paragraph 1). Augustine explains that he did not want to bother Caecilian except when there was need that he intercede on someone's behalf (paragraph 2). Augustine recounts the perfidious murder of Marcellinus by Marinus and explains why he himself left Carthage (paragraph 3). Caecilian's friendship with Marinus has rendered him suspect (paragraph 4). Augustine reminds Caecilian of the oath he swore about the outcome of the affair so that Augustine finds it difficult to believe that Caecilian was guilty of involvement (paragraph 5). But after Marcellinus' hasty execution Caecilian is suspected by many, and Augustine urges Caecilian to forgive people for believing the rumors (paragraph 6). Augustine assures Caecilian that he does not believe such rumors, but expresses his concern about Caecilian's continued friendship with Marinus (paragraph 7). Augustine pays high tribute to Marcellinus and his brother, Apringius (paragraph 8) and especially praises Marcellinus' chastity (paragraph 9). Death brought no evil to a man as good as Marcellinus, but Marinus did great harm to himself (paragraph 10). Augustine tells Caecilian that he must hate Marinus' crime and look out for his own reputation (paragraph 11). If Caecilian wants to be a real friend to Marinus, he must hate his crime (paragraph 12). Augustine explains why he is no longer in Carthage and expresses his displeasure at Caecilian's still remaining a catechumen (paragraphs 13 and 14).

*To my rightly illustrious lord and son, Caecilian, who is most deserving of the honor that I owe you, Augustine sends greetings in the Lord.*

1. The complaint about me that you inserted in your letter is more pleasing to me to the extent that it is more full of love. If, then, I should try to excuse my silence, what else shall I be trying to do but show that you did not have grounds for being angry at me? But since I love in you more the fact that you were so good as to be offended at my silence, which I had believed had no importance amid all your occupations, I would lose my case if I should strive to excuse myself. After all, if you had no reason to be indignant because I did not write to you, it is a sign that you do not hold me in esteem, since you bear it with indifference whether I speak or remain silent.<sup>2</sup> But since you were annoyed that I was silent, this indignation is not really indignation. I am therefore not as sorry that I did not send you our words as I am happy that you desired them. For it is an honor for me, not a

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1. The Caecilian to whom Letter 83 was sent seems clearly to have been a Catholic, while the addressee of the present letter is only a catechumen.

2. See Virgil, *Aeneid* III, 39.

reason for sorrow, that I merited to be reprimanded because I had not comforted by any message an old friend and—something that you ought to pass over in silence, but I ought to acknowledge—so good and great a man living abroad and laboring in the affairs of the state. Pardon me, then, as I give thanks that you did not think me unworthy of your anger when I was silent. For now, amid so many and such important tasks, not your own, but those of the state, that is, of all of us, I have come to believe that my letter could be not only not burdensome but even pleasing to a man of your benevolence, in which you surpass your excellence.

2. After all, when I received from some brothers the letter of Pope Innocent, a holy man who is worthy of reverence for his exceptional merits, which certain indications show was sent to me by Your Excellence, I thought that you did not send along at the same time a letter of your own because you did not want to be obliged to write back and forth, occupied as you were with weighty affairs. For it seemed natural indeed that, since you were so good as to send me the letter of the holy man, I would receive it along with one from you. For this reason I decided not to burden your mind with my letter unless it were necessary for the sake of recommending someone to whom I could not refuse this duty of making intercession. It is our custom to grant this to everyone, and it is a speaking out that, though inopportune, is by no means blameworthy. And so I did this; I recommended my friend to Your Goodness. And I have received from him a reply expressing his thanks, as I now thank you.

3. If I, however, thought something bad about you, especially regarding that case with which your letter was full, even though it was not explicitly mentioned,<sup>3</sup> I certainly would not write to you the sort of letter in which I asked a favor for myself or for anyone. For I would either remain silent, watching for the time when I might meet you in person, or, if I thought I should deal with the matter by letter, I would do that instead, and I would do it so that you would be barely able to endure my sorrow. For after the impious and cruel treachery of that man,<sup>4</sup> with whom we strongly insisted in vain, even through the concern that you shared with us, that he would not pierce our heart with that sorrow and slay his own conscience by so great a crime, I immediately left Carthage by an unannounced departure so that the many great men who feared his sword within the church would not hold me back with their violent weeping and groaning, thinking that my presence could do them some good. Otherwise, I might have been forced to beg him to spare their bodies, though I could not beseech him in a

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3. Marcellinus, the imperial commissioner and friend of Augustine, who had been sent to Africa to end the Donatist schism and presided over the Conference of Carthage in 411 at which the Donatists were condemned, was accused by the schismatics of supporting Heraclian's rebellion against the emperor, Honorius. Marinus, the new governor of Africa, arrested Marcellinus and his brother Apringius and had them executed in a sudden move that caught Augustine by surprise.

4. That is, Count Marinus.

sufficiently worthy manner to spare his own soul. The walls of the church, nonetheless, were sufficient to defend their bodily well-being. But I was constrained by dire circumstances because he would not allow me to be the sort of person that I ought to have been and because I would, moreover, be forced to do something unworthy of myself. I am also greatly distressed over the lot of my fellow bishop, the head of so great a church,<sup>5</sup> for it was said to be part of his duty to behave humbly toward the man after so wicked a deception on his part, in order that he might spare the others. I admit it; because I could not endure so great an evil with strength of mind, I left.

4. This would even now be reason for my silence with you, as it was then reason for my departure, if I believed that you had worked with him to exact such unjust vengeance. The people who believe these things do not know how and with what frequency you spoke with us and what you said to us when we were hoping with anxious concern that, the more he clung to you in friendship and the more frequently you conversed with him alone, the more he would take account of your judgment so that he would not impose such an end upon these men, who were called your enemies, so that you were thought to have aimed at nothing else with him. I myself do not believe this, nor do the brothers believe this who heard you in conversation with me and who saw signs of your kind heart from what they heard and from every gesture. But, I beg you, pardon those who do believe this, for they are human beings, and in the hearts of human beings there are such hiding places and such great depths that, though all suspicious people are rightly blamed, they think that they ought also to be praised for being cautious. The motives were there; we knew that you had suffered a very serious injury from one of them whom that criminal had suddenly ordered arrested. The brother of this man,<sup>6</sup> by whose death he most of all persecuted the Church, is also said to have replied to you, supposedly saying something harsh. Both were thought to be suspect in your eyes. When they were summoned and went off, while you remained there and were secretly, as is reported, speaking with him, they were suddenly ordered to be arrested. People were talking about your friendship, which was not recent but long-standing. Such close contact and such frequent conversation between the two of you alone confirmed the rumor. His power at that time was immense. The opportunity for slander was readily at hand. It was not a great task to find someone to say what that man ordered to be said with the promise of impunity. At the time, all these factors contributed to bringing it about that anyone could be done away with, even by just one witness, on the pretext of a hateful but credible crime, without any risk to the one issuing the order.

5. Meanwhile, since there was a rumor that the arm of the Church could rescue them, we were deluded by false promises that, not merely with his agree-

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5. That is, Aurelius, the bishop of Carthage.

6. That is, Marcellinus' brother, Apringius.

ment but even at his insistence, a bishop should be sent to the imperial court on their behalf. Meanwhile the promise was made in the hearing of bishops that, until an appeal had been lodged there on their behalf, no hearing would be given to their case. Finally, the day before their execution, Your Excellency came to us; you gave us the sort of hope you had never given us before that he could release them to you as you were about to depart. For you had soberly and wisely said that the whole conversation that he had with you, so long drawn out and conducted in a very friendly and private manner, was more a burden than an honor for you and amounted only to the fact that, after you shared and examined between you the plan for their death, no one had any doubt about what would follow after all this. When you indicated to us that you had said this, you interrupted your report, as you moved toward that place where the sacraments of the faithful are celebrated. And to our amazement you swore that you said this in such a way that I would regard myself as highly impudent if I believed anything bad about you not only then but even now after that horrible and unexpected outcome. You said that he was so moved by your words that you said that you would not give up hope that he was going to grant you their lives as a friendly gift for your journey.

6. For this reason, I swear to Your Grace that on the following day, when the unspeakable offspring of that labor was born, after it was suddenly reported to us that they were brought from prison to that judge, although we were upset, when I considered both what you had told us the day before and what day was coming after it, for the day after was the solemnity of Blessed Cyprian, I thought that he had also chosen that day on which to grant you your requests and that he wanted quickly to bring joy to the whole Church of Christ and to go to the place of so great a martyr with more glory from his goodness in sparing their lives than from his power over life and death. Suddenly a messenger burst in upon us from whom we learned that they were executed before we were able to ask the outcome of the hearing. For he made use of the nearest place, one not meant for the punishment of human beings but rather for an embellishment of the city. For this reason, we are right to believe that he ordered that some men be put to death there a few days before so that it would not be considered an odious innovation in the case of these two. His plan was that they could in that way be snatched from the protection of the Church, if they were not merely ordered to be executed immediately but were executed in a place quite nearby. He indicated clearly enough, therefore, that he did not fear to inflict torture upon that mother whose intervention he feared, that is, upon the holy Church, among whose faithful people, baptized in her bosom, we, of course, knew him to be. After this outcome of such an evil plan, after we had been dealt with so considerately that, thanks to you, we were almost confident and almost certain about their safety the day before, though you did not know this, who of such human beings as most human beings are would have any doubt that you yourself fed us mere words and took

their lives? And so, as I said, my good friend, even if we do not believe this, pardon those who do believe it.

7. God keep it from my heart and my whole way of life that I should intercede before you on behalf of someone or ask a favor for anyone if I believed that you were the author of this great sin and such criminal cruelty. But I openly admit, if you afterwards continue in that friendship in which you were before (let me openly express my sorrow without offense to you), you force us to believe much that we did not want to. But it is natural that I who do not believe those other things about you do not believe this either. By the unexpected and quick use of his power, your friend did not attack their lives more than your reputation. Nor, when I say these things, am I trying to kindle your hatred for him, forgetful of my own soul and calling, but I call you to a more faithful love. For one who deals with sinful persons so that they repent of their sinfulness also knows how to care for them with his anger. For, just as many sinful people do harm by their agreement, so many good people do good by their opposition. For he struck his own soul more gravely and more deeply by the same sword by which he most insolently killed the others. If he does not correct his soul by repenting and does not make good use of God's patience, he will be forced to discover and experience this after this life. But God's judgment has often permitted the present life even of good men to be taken by the bad so that we do not think it is evil to suffer such things. What harm, in fact, can dying in the flesh do to those who are destined to die? Or what do they achieve who fear to die but that they die a little later? Whatever harms the dying comes from life, not from death. If in death they have the sort of souls that the grace of Christ rescues, their death is certainly not the end of a good life but the occasion of a better one.

8. The conduct of the older brother<sup>7</sup> appeared to be more attached to this world than to Christ, although even he, after marrying, had corrected his previous youthful and worldly life to no small degree. Yet perhaps in his mercy God willed that he be his brother's companion in death only out of compassion. But that other one lived according to his religion with a very Christian heart and life. This reputation preceded him so that it was thus that he came on a matter of Church business, and it stayed with him after he came. But what goodness he had in conduct, what loyalty in friendship, what eagerness in learning, what sincerity in religion, what chastity in marriage, what self-control in judgment, what patience toward enemies, what affability toward friends, what humility toward the saints, what love toward all! What readiness he had in offering favors, what modesty in asking for them, what love for correct actions, what sorrow over sins! What great beauty of morality, what splendor of grace, what concern for piety! What mercy in helping, what benevolence in pardoning, what confidence in praying! How modestly he spoke what he knew was useful for salvation! How

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7. That is, Apringius.

cautiously he searched for what it was harmful not to know! What great scorn he had for things of the present, what great hope and desire he had for eternal goods! The bond of marriage by which he was already bound when he began to desire better things prevented him from abandoning all worldly pursuits and taking up the belt of a soldier of Christ, for it was not permissible to abandon those circumstances in which he was, although they were inferior.

9. One day his brother said to him, since he was likewise being held in prison, "If I am suffering this for what my sins deserve, what sins have brought you to this, since we know that your life is so devoutly and fervently Christian?" But Marcellinus replied, "Do you think that it is a small blessing that God confers upon me, at least if your testimony about my life is true, that by what I suffer, even if I suffer to the point of shedding my blood, my sins are punished in this life and not reserved for me until the judgment to come?" At this someone might perhaps believe that he was conscious of some hidden sins of impurity. I shall say, then, what the Lord God clearly wanted me to hear from his lips and to know as a great consolation for me. I was worried about this matter, as such sins are only human, and was dealing with him privately since he was already in the same prison, and I was afraid that there might be something for which he ought to make atonement to God by a greater and more noteworthy penance. He blushed at my suspicion, though a false one, as he was a man of singular modesty, but accepted my admonition most gratefully, smiling modestly and soberly. And grasping my right hand with both of his, he said, "I swear by the sacraments that this hand brings me that I have never experienced intercourse either before or after marriage except with my wife."

10. What evil, then, happened to this man in death? Was it not rather much good since, having these gifts, he left this life to go to Christ, without whom these gifts are possessed to no avail? I would not mention them to you if I thought that you were offended by my praise for him. But I do not believe this, nor do I in fact believe that he could have been put to death, I do not mean at your insistence but even at your will and desire. Hence you judge along with us more sincerely, to the extent that you do so more innocently, that Marinus treated his own soul more cruelly than Marcellinus' body when he reached the goal of his plotting with the death of Marcellinus, after he held us in contempt, held his own promises in contempt, held in contempt so many and such urgent petitions and warnings from you, and, finally, held the Church in contempt—and in it who but Christ? Or is Marinus' position of honor to be compared with Marcellinus' prison since the former raged furiously once he was raised up, while the latter rejoiced after he was locked up? By its horrible and punitive darkness, the conscience of that criminal surpasses not merely all prisons but even hell. How did he even harm you, for, though he seriously injured your reputation, he nonetheless did not take away your innocence? And yet, your reputation is also unharmed both in the eyes of those who know you better than we do and in our

own eyes. For we saw that your concerns that so monstrous a crime might be committed were expressed to us with such great affection that we almost saw with our eyes the invisible depths of your heart. He therefore harmed himself by whatever harm he did; he dealt a deadly blow to his own soul, his own life, his own conscience; and, finally, with that blind cruelty he ruined his own good reputation, something that even the very worst men usually desire. For he is the more hateful to all good men to the extent that he tried harder to please the wicked<sup>8</sup> or rejoiced to have pleased them.

11. But where could we see more clearly that he was not under the necessity that he imagined he was to do, as if he were a good man, so great a wrong, than from the fact that the emperor was not pleased, though Marinus dared to excuse himself on the basis of the emperor's order? Let the holy deacon Quintian report to Your Excellency, for he accompanied the bishop whom we sent on their behalf. Let him report how the imperial judges decided that the brothers should not even be granted a pardon, for fear that in that way they should be branded with some crime, but should only be given a memorandum ordering their release apart from any penalty. By needless cruelty and without any necessity—though there were perhaps other reasons that we suspect, and it is not necessary to put them in writing—Marinus brought terrible distress to the Church. His brother had once fled to the bosom of this Church because he feared for his life, with the result that Marinus could find him alive and his counselor in so great a crime. After he had offended his patron, he himself sought asylum in the Church, and it could not be denied him. If you love this man, detest his action; stand in horror at it if you do not want him to be punished for eternity. In that way you ought to look out for your own reputation and for his life. For one who loves in him what God hates does not hate only that man but also himself.

12. Since this is so, I do not believe regarding Your Goodness that you were either the author of so great a crime or had a share in it, nor do I believe that you were led astray by his malicious cruelty. God keep that from your life and conduct! I do not want your friendship to be the sort in which that man may boast of his sin to his own destruction or one which may confirm human suspicion, but rather the sort by which he may be inclined to penance and to the sort of penance that such horrible wounds demand as a remedy. For you will be a better friend the more you are opposed to his sins. I would, of course, like to know from the reply of Your Excellency where you were on that day on which the crime was committed, how you learned of it, and what you did afterward, or what you said to him when you saw him and what he said to you. For from the time I hurriedly left there on the next day, I was able to hear nothing about this matter concerning you.

13. But I read in your letter that you were forced to believe that I did not remain in Carthage in order that I might not see you. It is you rather who force me

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8. That is, the Donatists.



by these words to explain the reasons for my absence. One of these is that I can no longer sustain the work that I have to endure in that city and that, if I wanted to explain it, I would need another letter as long as this one. For in addition to my personal infirmity, which is known to all who know me fairly well, there is also old age, which is the common infirmity of the human race. Another reason is that I decided, if the Lord is willing, to spend as much time as I am allowed by those obligations demanded of me, given the needs of the Church that I serve as my duty, on the task of studies pertaining to the ecclesiastical sciences, where, if it is pleasing to God's mercy, I may also do some good for future generations.

14. But, if you want to hear the truth, there is one thing that I find it hard to put up with in you, namely, that, though you are a man of some age and of such a life and goodness, you still want to be a catechumen, as if believers cannot more faithfully and better govern the state to the extent that they are more faithful and better. But what good do you aim at in these great worries and labors of yours but that people may be well off? For, if you do not achieve this, it is better to sleep night and day than to keep watch in labors of the state that bring no benefit to people. Nor, of course, do I doubt that Your Excellency. . . .<sup>9</sup>

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9. The end of the letter is missing.

## Letter 152

In 413 or 414, Macedonius, who was at the time vicar of Africa, exchanged two sets of letters with Augustine. After receiving a letter, which has not survived, from Augustine who interceded on behalf of a condemned person, Macedonius tells him that he has granted the petition of Boniface, who carried Augustine's letter (paragraph 1). Macedonius asks how it can be a matter of religion to intercede on behalf of the guilty, especially on behalf of those who show little sign of repentance (paragraph 2). Finally, he states what he intends to do and asks Augustine to send him the writings he promised (paragraph 3).

*To Augustine, his rightly venerable lord and father worthy of singular reverence, Macedonius sends greetings.*

1. At last I have received the letter that I had desired from Your Holiness through the hands of Boniface, a bishop of our venerable religion, whom I received with greater affection because he brought me what I had wanted, that is, words from Your Holiness and news of your good health, my rightly venerable lord and father worthy of singular reverence. And so, he obtained without delay what he was asking for. But since the opportunity existed, I do not want the favor I granted at your request to remain without recompense, however small it may be. For I want to receive that recompense that will be to my advantage without its being a disadvantage to the one who bestows it, or better, that will be to my advantage as well as an honor to the one who bestows it.

2. You say that it is the responsibility of your priesthood to intervene on behalf of the guilty and to be offended if you do not get what you want, as if you did not get what pertains to your office. Here I have strong doubts that this comes from our religion. For, if the Lord forbids sins so that after the first penance he does not give a chance for a second penance,<sup>1</sup> how can we claim in the name of religion that we should forgive a crime, no matter of what sort it is? And when we want it to go unpunished, we of course approve of it. And if it is clear that in all sins not merely the one who commits a sin but also the one who approves of it is guilty, it is certain that we are bound together as accomplices in guilt as often as we want a person who is guilty of sin to go unpunished. Then, in addition, there is something more serious. For all sins seem to be more deserving of pardon when the one who is guilty promises correction. But now, given our bad habits, human beings want the punishment of the crime to be relaxed in their case and to keep that for the sake of which they committed the crime. Your priesthood thinks that it should also intervene on behalf of these persons concerning whom

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1. Macedonius refers to public penance, which was given only for very serious sins, such as apostasy, adultery, and murder. It could not be repeated.

there is no hope for future amendment to the point that even in the present the reason for the crime continues. For one who so tenaciously clings to that on account of which he committed the crime shows that he would commit similar sins when he had the chance.

3. For this reason, therefore, I consult Your Wisdom, and I desire to be released from this ambiguity under which I labor. Do not think that I have consulted you for another reason. But my aim is also to show favor to those who intercede, especially to someone as deserving as you are. For I hope to relax for good men who intercede many things that I do not want to be thought as done on my own initiative, for fear that a reduction in severity may arm others for crime. And in that way the pardon I readily grant may be thought to be due to another person's merit, while severity in judgment is not lost. You had promised me some of the writings of Your Holiness, and I have not received them. Please, send them now at least, and answer my letter in order that I may at least be nourished by your words, since I do not at present have the chance to see Your Holiness. May the eternal Godhead keep you safe and sound for very many years, my rightly venerable lord and father worthy of true reverence.

## Letter 153

Soon after the previous letter, in 413 or 414, Augustine replied to Macedonius' questions about intercession by bishops on behalf of the guilty. Macedonius had asked why Augustine supposes that it is the duty of a bishop to intercede on behalf of the guilty given the fact that the Church allows penance only once. Moreover, such intercession seems to make one an accomplice in the crime (paragraph 1). Augustine, first of all, agrees with Macedonius that all sins seem deserving of pardon when the guilty party promises amendment (paragraph 2). Next, he explains that he makes intercession for the guilty not because he approves of their sin but in order that they may be corrected in this life, where they still have a chance of amendment (paragraph 3). Augustine shows that the duty of intercession on behalf of the guilty stems from the teaching of Christ (paragraph 4). In commanding us to love our enemies and to do good to sinners, God certainly does not implicate us in their sins (paragraph 5). Excommunication of sinners aims only at bringing them to do penance for their sins (paragraph 6). Although the Church grants public penance only once to those who have committed serious sin, God continues to be merciful to those who repent (paragraph 7). There are different roles for the prosecutor, for the defense attorney, for the judge, and for the intercessor, but all should remember that they are sinners and need God's mercy (paragraph 8).

Augustine appeals to the examples of Christ who did not punish the adulteress and of Joseph who did not accuse Mary of adultery (paragraph 9). Augustine also points to Macedonius' act of interceding with the bishop of Carthage on behalf of a cleric and argues that, if he could do so to spare the man a rebuke, Augustine ought for far better reason to intercede to spare a man's life (paragraph 10). We should follow Christ's example of mercy in dealing with the adulteress (paragraph 11). In this life we cannot say that we are without all sin (paragraph 12). Rather, we are good insofar as we are children of God and bad insofar as we are sinners (paragraph 13). Jesus called the same people both good and bad, and even Seneca reminds us that we are all bad (paragraph 14). In dealing with the woman taken in adultery, Jesus condemned the sin but pardoned the woman (paragraph 15). The power of the state was instituted for good reason, and Christian clemency does not interfere with it (paragraph 16). A person can be merciful in punishing someone and cruel in sparing someone (paragraph 17). At times intercession leads to bad results, but Christian mercy should be judged in terms of its aims (paragraph 18). Both the severity of the officials of the state and the intercession of a bishop are beneficial (paragraph 19).

Augustine insists that a thief should not be pardoned if he has not made restitution, provided that he has the means to do so (paragraph 20). Someone who intercedes on behalf of a thief and does not insist upon his making restitution, when he can, shares in the guilt of the theft (paragraph 21). It is, however, possible that we are deceived about whether a thief can make restitution (paragraph 22). A judge ought not to sell his judgment, even if it is true, nor ought a witness to sell his testimony, even if it is true (paragraph 23). It is a tolerable custom for some lower officials to accept gifts from both parties to a transaction, and after their conver-

sion to give such acquisitions to the poor rather than restore them to their givers (paragraph 24). But justice demands that a lawyer return what he wrongfully took in a court of law (paragraph 25). Finally, Augustine points out that justice, unlike money, can never be wrongfully possessed, and he wishes Macedonius happiness in Christ (paragraph 26).

*Augustine, bishop and servant of Christ and his family, sends greetings in the Lord to his beloved son, Macedonius.*

1. I. We ought neither to leave you without a reply nor take up your time with an introduction, you who are the busiest man in the state and most attentive not to your own advantage but to that of others, for we are happy not only for you but for human affairs, that you are such a man. Receive, then, what you wanted either to learn from me or to test whether I myself knew it. If you judged it something slight or superfluous, you would by no means think that in the midst of such important and necessary concerns you should be concerned about this. You ask me why we say that it is part of our priestly responsibility to intercede on behalf of the guilty and to be offended if we do not get what we asked for, as if we do not get what pertains to our office. On this point you say that you are deeply in doubt about whether this comes from our religion. Then you add the reason why you are so upset. "For," you say, "if the Lord forbids sins so that after the first penance he does not give a chance for a second penance, how can we claim in the name of religion that we should forgive a crime, no matter of what sort it is?" And you add a more serious point and say that we approve what we want to go unpunished, and "if it is clear that in all sins not merely the one who commits a sin but also the one who approves of it is guilty, it is certain that we are bound together as accomplices in guilt as often as we want a person who is guilty of sin to go unpunished."<sup>1</sup>

2. Whom would you not frighten with these words, if he were unaware of your gentleness and kindness? Hence, we who know you do not doubt that you wrote this for the sake of raising a question, not for the sake of pronouncing judgment, and we reply to this with other words of yours. For, as if you did not want us to linger over this question, you either foresaw what we were going to say or taught us what we ought to say. You said, "Then, in addition, there is something more serious. For all sins seem to be more deserving of pardon when the one who is guilty promises correction." Before, then, I discuss what that more serious point is that follows in your letter, I shall in the meanwhile take what you gave and use it to remove this weight that might seem to be able to suppress our acts of intercession. As far as we have the chance, we of course intercede on behalf of all sins because all sins seem more deserving of pardon when the one who is guilty promises correction. This is your view, and this is ours too.

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1. Letter 152.2.

3. In no way, then, do we approve of the sins that we want to be corrected, nor do we want the wrongdoing to go unpunished because we find it pleasing. Rather, having compassion for the person and detesting the sin or crime, the more we are displeased by the sin the less we want the sinful person to perish without having been corrected. For it is easy and natural to hate evil persons because they are evil, but it is rare and holy to love those same persons because they are human beings. Thus in one person you at the same time both blame the sin and approve of the nature, and for this reason you more justly hate the sin because it defiles the nature that you love. He, therefore, who punishes the crime in order to set free the human being is bound to another person as a companion not in injustice but in humanity. There is no other place for correcting our conduct save in this life. For after this life each person will have what he earned for himself in this life. And so, out of love for the human race we are compelled to intercede on behalf of the guilty lest they end this life through punishment so that, when it is ended, they cannot have an end to their punishment.

2, 4. Do not, therefore, have any doubt that this duty of ours comes from our religion, since God, with whom there is no injustice, whose power is supreme, who not only sees what sort of person each one is but also foresees what sort of person one will be, who alone cannot make a mistake in judging because he cannot be deceived in knowing, *makes*, nonetheless, as the gospel says, *his sun to rise over the good and the evil and sends rain upon the just and the unjust* (Mt 5:45). Christ the Lord exhorts us to imitate this marvelous goodness; he says, *Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be children of your Father, who is in heaven, who makes his sun to rise over the good and the evil and sends rain upon the just and the unjust* (Mt 5:4-45). Who can fail to know that many have misused this leniency and gentleness to their own destruction? The apostle blames them and severely rebukes them; he says, *But do you think, every one of you who judges those who do such things, though you yourself do them, that you will escape the judgment of God? Do you hold in contempt the riches of his goodness and patience and tolerance? Do you not know that the goodness of God is leading you to repentance? But according to the hardness of your unrepentant heart you store up for yourself wrath on the day of wrath and of the revelation of the just judgment of God, who will pay back each according to his works* (Rom 2:3-6). Does God not persevere in his patience because these people persevere in their wickedness? He punishes very few sins in this world in order that people not suppose that there is no divine providence, and he reserves many for the last judgment in order to emphasize that judgment.

5. For that heavenly teacher does not, I think, command 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. For, if we worship God piously, we undoubtedly can have only wicked persons as enemies and as people roused against us with

most bitter hatred and as persecutors. Should we, then, love the wicked? Are we to do good to the wicked? Are we also to pray for the wicked? Yes, of course! After all, it is God who commands this. Yet he does not in this way put us in league with the wicked, nor is he himself, of course, in league with them when he pardons them and gives them eternal life. The apostle explains his plan to the extent that a pious person is permitted to know it; he says, *Do you not know that the patience of God is leading you to repentance?* (Rom 2:4). We want to lead to this repentance those for whom we make intercession; we do not spare or favor their sins.

3, 6. For we remove from the fellowship of the altar certain persons whose grave sins are public, although they were released from your severity, in order that by doing penance and by punishing themselves they may appease him whom they held in contempt by sinning. For someone who truly repents does nothing else but makes sure that the evil he did does not go unpunished. For in that way God, whose deep and just judgment no one escapes if he holds it in contempt, spares those who do not spare themselves. But if in sparing the unjust and wicked and granting them life and salvation, even to many of them whom he knows will not do penance, he nonetheless shows patience, how much more ought we to be merciful toward those who promise correction, even if we are uncertain whether they will do what they promise! For we act in order to mitigate your rigor by interceding for those for whom we also pray to the Lord, from whom none of their actions are hidden, even their future actions. And yet we do not do this impudently because the Lord himself commanded it.

7. At times, however, the wickedness of human beings advances to such a point that they commit either similar sins or more serious ones, even after having done penance and after the reconciliation of the altar. And still God makes his sun to rise even over such people, nor does he give them his most bounteous gifts of life and salvation less than before. And though they are not given in the Church that place of penance, yet God does not forget his patience in their regard. If anyone from their number says to us, "Either give me again the same place of doing penance, or leave me, a hopeless case, to do whatever I want, to the extent that I can help myself with my money and am not prevented by human laws, with prostitutes and in every form of dissoluteness, something that God condemns but that is even praiseworthy in the eyes of most men. Or if you call me back from this sinfulness, tell me whether it does me some good for the life to come, if in this life I scorn the enticements of pleasure with its powerful attractions, if I rein in the impulses of sexual desires, if I deprive myself even of many licit and permissible things to chastise my body, if I torment myself by doing penance more vigorously than before, if I groan more pitifully, if I weep more abundantly, if I live a better life, if I care for the poor more generously, if I burn more ardently with the love that covers a multitude of sins."<sup>2</sup> Who of us would be

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2. See I Pt 4:8.

so foolish as to say to this man, "These acts will do you no good for the next life. Go, enjoy at least the sweetness of this life"? May God prevent such monstrous and sacrilegious insanity! And yet it was a cautious and salutary provision that a place for that most humble penance be granted only once in the Church for fear that cheap medicine might become less beneficial for the sick. After all, it will be more salutary to the extent that it is held less in contempt. Who, nonetheless, would dare to say to God, "Why do you still once more spare this man who, after his first penance, again entangles himself in the snares of iniquity?" Who would dare to say that God does not do regarding these people what the apostle says: *Do you not know that the patience of God is leading you to repentance?* (Rom 2:4). Or that, with the exception of these people, the words of scripture hold true: *Blessed are all who put their trust in him* (Ps 2:13)? Or that these words do not pertain to them: *Act courageously, and let your heart be strong, all you who hope in the Lord* (Ps 31:25)?

8. Since, then, God has such great patience and such great mercy for sinners that, if they have corrected their conduct in this life, they are not condemned for eternity, though God does not look for mercy to be shown him from anyone, since no one is more happy, no one more powerful, and no one more just than he, how should we human beings behave toward other human beings? For, no matter how much praise we have accumulated for this life of ours, we do not say that it is free from sin. After all, as scripture says, *if we say that, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not found in us* (1 Jn 1:8). Hence there are distinct roles for the prosecutor, for the defense attorney, for the intercessor, and for the judge, and it would take too long and is not necessary to discuss their particular duties in this letter. So even those who punish crimes should not be moved by personal anger in their office but should be servants of the laws, avenging not their own injuries but those of others, just as judges ought to do. The judgment of God has filled them with fear so that they keep in mind that they need God's mercy on account of their own sins and do not suppose that it counts as a failure in their office if they act mercifully in any way toward those over whom they have the legitimate power of life and death.

4. 9. For, when the Jews brought to Christ the Lord the woman caught in adultery and said, to test him, that the law commanded that she be stoned, they then asked him what he himself commanded in her regard. He answered them, *Let whoever of you is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her* (Jn 8:7). Nor did he in this way show his disapproval of the law that commanded that those guilty of such a sin be put to death. But by frightening them, he called back to mercy those by whose judgment she could have been put to death. I suspect that, if her husband was also present and was asking that the fidelity of his bed be vindicated, once he heard these words of the Lord, he was filled with fear and turned his mind away from the desire for vengeance to the will to pardon. For how was her accuser not warned not to pursue the injuries he suffered when the judges



themselves were forbidden to exact punishment, though in punishing the adulteress they were not driven to satisfy their personal pain but the law? For this reason, when Joseph, to whom the Virgin Mary, the mother of the Lord, was engaged, discovered that she was pregnant, though he knew that he had not had intercourse with her and for this reason believed that she was an adulteress, he still did not want her to be punished. Nor did he approve of the sin. For this desire of his is attributed to justice; scripture, of course, speaks of him as follows: *And since he was a just man and was unwilling to make public knowledge of her, he decided to send her off privately. While he was thinking of this, an angel appeared to him* (Mt 1:18-20) in order to explain to him that what he had thought was a sin was the work of God.

10. If therefore a consideration of our common weakness breaks down the indignation of the prosecutor and the rigor of the judge, what then do you think should be the duty of either the defense attorney or the intercessor? Since even you good men who are now judges once worked in court and took up the cases of human beings, you know how you used to defend a case more gladly than prosecute one. And yet a defense attorney is very different from an intercessor. For the defense attorney puts most effort into undermining or obscuring the charges, but the intercessor shows concern to remove or to lessen the punishment, even when the guilt is clear. The righteous do this before God on behalf of sinners; the sinners themselves are admonished to do this for one another. For scripture says, *Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another* (Jas 5:16). Every human being claims for himself before another, when he can, this duty of human kindness. For each person wants that crime to go unpunished in the house of another that he would punish if it were committed in his own. For, if the appeal is before a friend or if in our presence the man with the power to punish becomes angry at someone or if we by chance come upon someone who is angry, we are judged not most just but most inhuman if we do not intercede. I know that you yourself have interceded along with other friends of yours in the church of Carthage on behalf of a cleric with whom the bishop was rightly angry, and there was certainly no fear of condemnation to death under that discipline, which involves no bloodshed. And though you wanted that wrong, which was displeasing even to you, to go unpunished, we did not judge that you approved of the sin but heard that you interceded in a most kind manner. If you are permitted to mitigate the severity of an ecclesiastical rebuke by interceding, how is it that a bishop should not intercede with you who have the power of the sword? For the former punishment was employed in order that the person might live a good life, while the latter is employed in order that this man not continue to live!

11. Finally, the Lord himself interceded before human beings so that the adulteress was not stoned, and he commended to us in that way the duty of intercession, except that he did by causing fear what we do by begging. For he is the Lord, while we are his servants. But he caused fear in such a way that we all

ought to have fear. For who of us is without sin? After he had said to those who presented the adulteress to him for punishment that the one who knew that he was without sin should be the first to throw a stone at her, their anger collapsed as their conscience trembled. For at that point they slipped away from that gathering and left the poor woman to the merciful Lord. Let the piety of Christians yield to the words to which the impiety of the Jews yielded. Let the humility of his followers yield to him to whom the pride of his persecutors yielded. Let faithful confession yield to him to whom the hypocrisy of a tempter yielded. Spare the evil, O good man. Be gentler the better you are. Become humbler in piety to the extent you are higher in power.

5. 12. I who see your good conduct have called you a good man, but you who see the words of Christ, say to yourself, *No one is good except God* (Mk 10:18). Though this is true, because the Truth said it, you should not think that what I said was a false statement and that I was more or less contradicting the words of the Lord by calling you a good man, although he says, *No one is good except God*. After all, the Lord did not contradict himself when he said, *A good man brings forth good things from the storehouse of his heart* (Lk 6:45). God, then, is good in a singular way, and he cannot lose this. After all, he is not good by participation in some good, because he is for himself the good by which he is good. But when a human being is good, his goodness comes from God, and it cannot come from himself. For whoever of us becomes good does so by his Spirit, because our nature was created capable of partaking of him by our will. If we are to be good, therefore, it is up to us to receive and to hold on to what he gives, whose goodness comes from himself. Anyone who neglects this is evil because of himself. Hence, one is good to the extent that he acts correctly, that is, knowingly, lovingly, and piously produces good, and one is evil to the extent that he sins, that is, turns away from the truth, from love, and from piety. But who is there in this life without some sin? Yet we call a person good if goodness predominates, and we call a person best who sins the least.

13. For this reason the Lord himself also calls the same people evil on account of the sins of human weakness whom he calls good on account of their participation in divine grace, until our whole being is healed of all sinfulness and passes into that life where there will be no sin at all. After all, he taught good people, not evil ones, to pray when he commanded them to say, *Our Father, who art in heaven* (Mt 6:9). For they are good because they are children of God, not born such by nature but made such by grace, inasmuch as they are those to whom he gave the power to become children of God because they received him.<sup>3</sup> This spiritual generation is also called adoption in accord with the custom of the scriptures in order to distinguish it from that generation of God from God, of the coeternal from the eternal, of which scripture says, *Who will recount his genera-*

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3. See Jn 1:12.

tion? (Is 53:8). Though he showed that they were good whom he wanted to say to God, *Our Father, who art in heaven*, he still commanded that they say in the same prayer, among other things, *Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors* (Mt 6:12). Although it is evident that these debts are sins, he afterward explained this more clearly when he said: *For, if you forgive human beings their sins, your Father will also forgive you your sins* (Mt 6:14). The baptized say this prayer, nor are there any past sins at all that are not forgiven in those baptized in the Church. But unless, as they live in this mortal frailty, they contracted some sin afterward that needed to be forgiven, they would not truthfully say, *Forgive us our debts*. They are good people, then, inasmuch as they are children of God, but insofar as they sin—something they admit by their honest confession—they are, of course, evil.

14. Someone might perhaps say that the sins of good people are different from the sins of evil people, and this is not said without good reason. But clearly the Lord Jesus called those same people evil, though he said that God was their father. For in the same sermon in which he taught that prayer, when exhorting them to pray to God, he said in another passage, *Ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who seeks finds, and for everyone who knocks the door will be opened* (Mt 7:7-8). And a little later he says, *If, then, though you are evil, you know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him?* (Mt 7:11) Is God, therefore, the father of evil people? Heaven forbid! How, then, does he say, *Your heavenly Father*, to those to whom he says, *Though you are evil*, unless the Truth is indicating two things: what we are by the goodness of God and what we are by human sinfulness, praising the one and correcting the other? Seneca, a man who lived at the time of the apostles and whose letters to Paul we also read, was right to say, "One who hates bad people hates everyone."<sup>4</sup> And yet we should love those who are bad in order that they might cease to be bad, just as we love the ill not in order that they may remain ill but in order that they may be healed.

15. But after that destruction of sins that takes place in baptism, whatever sin we commit while abiding in this life, even if it is not the sort of sin that forces a person to be separated from the altar of God, is wiped away not by fruitless sorrow but by sacrifices of mercy. Know, then, that we offer to God on your behalf what we get you to do by our intercession. After all, you need the mercy that you show, and see who said, *Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it*

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4. Seneca was the Roman philosopher who taught the emperor, Nero. Augustine alludes to an apocryphal correspondence between the philosopher and the apostle. In *Illustrious Men (De viris illustribus)* 12: PL 23, 629, Jerome says, "I would not put [Seneca] in a catalogue of the saints if I were not called to do so by those letters of Paul to Seneca and of Seneca to Paul that are read by many."

will be given to you (Lk 6:37-38). And yet, even if we lived so that there was no reason why we should say, *Forgive us our debts*, to the extent that our mind is freer from sinfulness it ought to be more full of clemency. Thus, even if we were not smitten by the words of the Lord when he said, *Let the one of you who is without sin throw the first stone at her* (Jn 8:7), we should follow the example of him who, though he was certainly without sin, said to the woman whom her frightened accusers left alone, *Nor will I condemn you; go, sin no more* (Jn 8:11). After all, the sinful woman could have feared that, when those men left who reflected upon their own sins so that they spared the sin of another, he who was without sin might himself condemn her with full justice. But he, not fearful in his conscience but full of clemency, said when she answered that no one had condemned her, *Nor will I condemn you*, as if to say, "If the guilty could spare you, why do you fear the innocent?" And so that he would not be thought to condone sins but to pardon them, he said, *Go, sin no more*, in order to show that he spared a human being and not that he approved of her sin. You now see that the fact that we, though not criminals, often intercede even for criminals, and that we, though sinners, intercede for sinners, stems from our religion and that we do not become implicated in their crimes, and I think that you understand that we said truthfully rather than insultingly that we intercede before sinners.

16. Nor does it follow, of course, that the power of the sovereign, the judge's right over life and death, the executioner's instruments of torture, the weapons of the soldier, the discipline of the ruler, and the severity of a good father were instituted to no avail. All these have their limits, causes, reasons, and utility. When these are feared, the evil are held in check and the good live more peaceful lives among the evil. It is not that those who do not sin because they fear such things should be declared to be good. For no one is good out of a fear of punishment but out of a love of righteousness. But it is not without benefit that human audacity is held in check even by fear of the laws in order that the innocent might be safe amid the wicked and in order that, by calling upon God, the will might be healed in the wicked themselves, while the possibility of their committing sin is held in check by the fear of punishment. The intercession of bishops is not opposed to this arrangement of human affairs; in fact, there would be neither a reason nor a place for any intercession if they did not exist. After all, the benefits of those who intercede and of those who pardon are more gratifying to the extent that the punishments of the sinners are more just. Nor, in my opinion, did a more severe punishment of the law prevail in the Old Testament in the time of the ancient prophets for any other reason than to show that punishments were rightly instituted for the wicked. Thus the fact that we are taught to pardon them with the forgiveness of the New Testament is either the remedy of salvation by which sins, including our own, are pardoned or an instruction in gentleness in order that, because of those who grant pardon, the truth they preach may not only be feared but also loved.

17. The attitude with which one grants pardon is, however, very important. For just as at times mercy punishes, so cruelty also pardons. After all, to set forth something obvious as an example, who would not more correctly call him cruel who gave in to a boy who was most insistent about wanting to play with snakes? But who would not call a person merciful who forbade such actions and chastised even with a beating the boy who scorned his words? And for this reason discipline should not be carried to the point of death in order that the person may still live who can benefit from it. And yet, when one human being kills another, there is a big difference whether one kills out of a desire to do harm or to take something unjustly, as an enemy or a thief does, or whether one kills in a situation of punishing or obeying, as a judge or an executioner does, or whether one kills out of the need to escape attack, as a traveler kills a robber, or out of the need to help someone, as a soldier kills an enemy. And, at times, the one who was the reason for the death is guilty rather than the killer, such as when one deceives his bail bondsman and the latter pays the legitimate penalty instead of him. Nor is everyone guilty who is the reason for another's death. After all, what if someone tries to commit an immoral act and kills himself if he does not get what he wants? What if a son fears his father's well-meant beatings and throws himself over a cliff? What if one man causes his own death because another has been released or for fear that he might be released? Must we on account of these reasons for the deaths of others either consent to a sinful act or abolish the punishment of a sin, if the punishment is carried out with the desire not to do harm but to correct, even by a father? Or must we curtail works of mercy? When these deaths occur, we ought to feel a sorrow that is human, but we do not on their account hold back our desire for correct actions in order that these deaths may not occur.

18. So, even when we intercede for a sinner who is about to be condemned, at times there follow results that we do not want. These occur in the person who is set free because of our intercession and in his unpunished audacity prowls about even more savagely, since he is subject to passion and ungrateful for leniency, and one man rescued from death slays many. Or another man perishes by living a bad life and commits the same sins or worse ones, because he set before his eyes the impunity of this man, after he was by our help changed for the better and corrected in his conduct. These evils should not, in my opinion, be imputed to us when we intercede with you, but rather those good things that we look to and want. I mean the emphasis upon gentleness to win love for the word of truth and the hope that those who are set free from temporal death may live so that they do not incur eternal death, from which they will never be set free.

19. Your severity, therefore, is beneficial, by means of which our tranquility is also secured; and our intercession is beneficial, by means of which your severity is also tempered. Let it not displease you that good people petition you, because it also does not displease good people that you are feared by the evil. For even the apostle Paul frightened wicked men not only with the judgment to come

but also with your present powers as judge, and he said that they belong to the plan of divine providence. He said, *Let every soul be subject to the higher authorities. For there is no authority except from God. But those that exist have been established by God. Hence, one who resists authority resists the order established by God. But those who resist bring condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not feared on account of good deeds but on account of evil ones. Do you want to have no fear of someone in authority? Do good, and you will have praise from him. For he is the minister of God for your good. But if you do evil, fear. For he does not carry the sword for no purpose. He is, after all, the minister of God to punish in anger one who does evil. And so, you must be subject not only on account of his anger but also on account of your conscience. For this reason, after all, you also pay taxes. The authorities are the ministers of God, continuing in this role. Pay your debts to all: tribute to whom you owe tribute, taxes to whom you owe taxes, fear to whom you owe fear, honor to whom you owe honor. Owe no one anything except that you love one another* (Rom 13:1-8). These words of the apostle show the usefulness of your severity. Hence, just as those who fear are commanded to owe love to those who cause fear, so those who cause fear are commanded to owe love to those who fear them. Nothing should be done out of the desire to do harm, but everything should be done out of a love to show concern. And let nothing be done cruelly, nothing inhumanely. In that way the punishment of the judge will be feared so that the religion of the intercessor is not held in contempt, because both punishing and pardoning are done well only in order to correct the life of human beings. But if the wickedness and impiety is so great that neither discipline nor pardon can do any good for correcting it, good men fulfill the duty of love with the intention and conscience that God sees, whether by severity or by leniency.

20. As for what follows next in your letter, where you say, "But now, given our bad habits, human beings want the punishment of the crime to be relaxed in their case and to keep that for the sake of which they committed the crime,"<sup>5</sup> you mention the very worst kind of human beings for whom the remedy of repentance is absolutely useless. For, if the property of another on account of which the sin was committed is not returned, though it can be returned, one does not do penance but only pretends to. But if one truly does penance, the sin is not forgiven unless the stolen property is returned, but only, as I said, when it can be returned. For quite often the one who takes it loses it, either because he meets with other bad persons or because he lives a bad life himself, and he does not have anything else by which he might make restitution. We certainly cannot say to this person: "Return what you took," except when we believe that he has it and denies that he does. In this case, if he endures some torture from the one demanding the return of his property, when he is thought to have it to return,

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5. Letter 152, 2.

there is no injustice, because, even if he does not have the means to return the stolen money, he nonetheless rightly pays the penalty of the sin by which it was taken when he is being forced to restore it by physical punishment. But it is not inhuman to intercede even for such persons, as if for those guilty of crimes. The purpose is not that the property of another might not be restored but that one human being not uselessly rage against another, especially a man who has already forgiven the sin but is asking for the money and who, even if he feared being cheated, does not seek vindication. Finally, if we can in such cases convince the judge that those people for whom we intercede do not have what is being demanded, we immediately have less trouble from them. At times, however, merciful persons, precisely in such a doubtful case, do not want to impose certain punishments for uncertain money. It is fitting that we also challenge and exhort you to this mercy. For it is better that you lose it, even if he has it, than that you either torture or kill him if he does not. But for these persons it is appropriate for us to intercede with those who are seeking a return of their money rather than with the judges. Otherwise, the judge might seem to take it away if, though he has the power, he does not force him to restore what was stolen. And yet, in using force, he ought to maintain his integrity so that he does not lose his humanity either.

21. But this I would say with full confidence: Someone who intercedes for another in order that he might not restore what he wrongly took and who does not force a man who has recourse to him to make restitution, to the extent that he honestly can, shares in his fraud and crime. For we are more merciful in withdrawing our help than in giving it in such cases. After all, someone who helps him to sin does not offer him aid but rather destroys and kills him. But for this reason can we or should we either exact the penalty or hand him over for the exaction of it? We act within the limits of our episcopal power when we threaten a person at times with the judgment of men but most of all and always with the judgment of God. But we blame, rebuke, and despise those who refuse to make restitution and who we know stole something and have the means to make restitution. We do this in some cases privately and in some cases publicly as different persons are seen to be able to accept different medicine and are not roused to greater madness to the destruction of others. At times we also deprive them of communion at the holy altar if a more urgent concern does not prevent us.

22. But it often happens that they deceive us either by denying that they stole or by claiming that they do not have the means to make restitution. And you yourself are often deceived when you think that we are not trying to get them to make restitution or that they have the means to make restitution. And all or almost all of us human beings like to call or consider as knowledge our suspicions when we are moved by credible indications of what is the case, though some credible indications are false just as some incredible ones are true. And so, in recalling certain persons who “both want the punishment of the crime to be

relaxed for them and to keep that on account of which they committed the crime," you went on to say, "Your priesthood thinks that it should also intervene on behalf of these persons." After all, it is possible that you know what I do not know and that for this reason I think that I should intercede for someone because he was able to deceive me, though he was not able to deceive you, and in that way I would not believe that he possesses what you know that he possesses. So it turns out that, though our judgment about the guilty person is not the same, still neither of us is happy with the fact that the property of another person is not restored. As human beings, we have different views of human beings, but we are together on the question of justice. In the same way, it can also happen that you are not absolutely certain, but have reasons to suspect, that a person has what I know that he does not have, and for this reason you think that I intercede for a person who wants to have the punishment of the crime to be relaxed in his case and to keep that on account of which he committed the crime. In conclusion, then, neither before you nor before others—if they are found to be such men as we are happy that you are—nor before those who with a great desire seek to possess the goods of others that do not benefit them and that are very dangerous and harmful,<sup>6</sup> nor before my own heart, of which God is a witness, would I dare to say, think, or decide that I should intercede for someone in order that he might possess with his crime unpunished what he stole by his crime, but only that he might return what he wrongfully took, once his wrongdoing has been forgiven, provided he has what he stole or other means to make restitution.

23. Not everything, of course, that is taken from someone against his will is wrongfully taken from him. For many people do not want to pay the doctor his fee nor the worker his wage, and still those who receive these against the will of the people from whom they receive them do not receive them wrongfully, since it is rather through wrongfulness that they are not given them. But a judge ought not to sell his just judgment nor a witness his true testimony because an advocate sells his just advocacy and a lawyer his true counsel. For the former are used by both parties to a hearing, but the latter are on just one side. But when judgments and testimonies, which should not be sold when they are just and true, are sold when they are unjust and false, it is much worse to take the money. For it is taken wrongfully, even though it is being taken from people who are willing. The person, nonetheless, who buys a just judgment often seeks to recover the money, as if it were wrongly taken from him, because it ought not to have been for sale. But someone who paid for an unjust judgment would, of course, want to ask for his money back if he were not afraid or were not ashamed to have bought it.

24. There are other persons of a lower type who shamelessly take money from both sides, such as an official who takes money both from someone from whom a service is provided and from someone for whom it is provided. People usually

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6. See Sallust, *The War against Jugurtha* 1, 5.



demand back what has been extorted by these types through gross dishonesty; they usually do not demand back what has been given through a custom that is tolerable. And we blame those people more who asked for such things back contrary to custom than those who took them according to custom, because many persons who are needed for managing human affairs are either enticed or held onto by such advantages. If these people change their way of life or rise to a level of more excellent holiness, they are more ready to give to the poor what they acquired in this way as if it were their own than to restore it to those from whom they received it as if it were not theirs. But we judge that those who took things contrary to the law of human society by thefts, robberies, slanders, assaults, and attacks ought to make restitution rather than to give them to the poor. This is in accord with the gospel example of Zacchaeus. When he received the Lord as his guest, he was suddenly converted to a holy life. He said, *I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have taken something from someone, I repay it fourfold* (Lk 19:8).

25. If, nonetheless, one considers justice more carefully, one says with more justice to the advocate, "Return what you took when you stood opposed to the truth, sided with injustice, deceived the judge, defeated a just case, or won a case by lies." And you see many very distinguished and eloquent lawyers think that they do this not only with impunity but even with glory. One says this with more justice to an advocate than one says it to anyone else serving in some office, "Return what you received when by order of a judge you arrested a man needed for some case, put him in chains so that he would not resist, locked him up so that he would not flee, and finally either presented him to the court if the dispute lasted or dismissed him if it was ended." But it is obvious why one does not say this to the advocate, namely, because a man does not want to ask back what he gave to his defense counsel in order to win the case unjustly, just as he does not want to repay what he received from his adversary when he won the case unjustly. Finally, where can one easily find a lawyer or a man of honor who was once a lawyer who says to his client, "Take what you gave me when I wrongly took your case, and repay to your adversary what you wrongfully took through my action"? And yet, someone who most correctly repents of his former unjust life ought also to do this so that, if the lawyer who argued the unjust case does not want to correct the injustice after having been admonished, his client, nonetheless, does not want to keep the reward of that injustice. Or are we supposed to restore the property of another that was taken secretly by theft, while we are not supposed to restore the property of another that was obtained through deceiving the judge and circumventing the laws in the court where wrongdoing is punished? What shall I say about the interest that the laws and the judges themselves command to be repaid? Or is he more cruel who steals or snatches something from a wealthy man than he who ruins a poor person through usury? These

gains and others of the sort are, of course, wrongly possessed, and I would demand their restitution, but there is no judge under whom they can be claimed.

26. Now, if we wisely consider the words of scripture, *A faithful man has a whole world of riches, but an unfaithful man does not have even a penny* (Prv 17:6 LXX), do we not prove guilty of possessing the goods of others all those who seem to themselves to be happy over their gains but certainly do not know how to use them? For what is lawfully possessed is certainly not someone else's property. But what is lawfully possessed is justly possessed, and what is justly possessed is correctly possessed. Everything, then, that is wrongly possessed is someone else's property, but one who uses it wrongly possesses it wrongly. You see, then, how many people ought to return the property of others, if at least a few people are found to whom they might return it. These people, wherever they are, hold these things more in contempt to the extent that they could possess them with more justice. No one, of course, wrongly possesses justice, and one who does not love it does not have it. But money is both wrongly possessed by bad people and possessed by good people in a better way to the extent that it is loved less. But in these circumstances the injustice of people who possess goods wrongly is tolerated, and certain laws are established among them that are called civil laws. These laws do not make people good users of such goods but make those who use them wrongly less troublesome until faithful and pious people, to whom all things rightly belong, who either emerge from them or who, living among them in the meanwhile, are not implicated in their sins but are tested by them, come to that city where their eternal inheritance is. There, only a just person has a place, only a wise person a position of power; all who will be there will truly possess their own property. But still, even here we do not intercede in order that the property of others may not be restored in accord with earthly laws and customs, although we want you to be merciful to sinners not in order that they may be loved or remain sinners but because all who become good persons become such from them and because God is pleased with a sacrifice of mercy. For, if he were not merciful to sinners, there would be no good people. I have been burdensome to you for a long time, I think, given all the things you have to do, though the questions you asked could have been quickly resolved by a clever and learned man like you. But I ought long ago to have concluded, if I knew that you alone were going to read this. May you live happily in Christ, my dearest son.

## Letter 154

In 413 or 414 Macedonius wrote to Augustine. He informs Augustine that he has granted the favor that Augustine had asked for (paragraph 1). He tells Augustine that he read the first three books of *The City of God* from beginning to end and compliments Augustine on their content (paragraph 2). Macedonius expresses a wish that he had the time and leisure to write something on Italy and sends Augustine his best wishes (paragraph 3).

*To Augustine, his rightly venerable lord and truly lovable father, Macedonius sends greetings.*

1. I am amazed at your wisdom both in the works that you published and in the letter that you did not hesitate to send, interceding on behalf of those in trouble. For those works have such acumen, knowledge, and holiness that nothing surpasses them, and this letter has such respectfulness that, unless I do what you command, I would judge that blame lies with me, not with the task you gave me, my rightly venerable lord and truly lovable father. For you do not insist that you obtain whatever you desire out of some concern—something that very many men of this place do. But you advise me of what you think that you should ask for from a judge caught up in so many problems, and you use a respectfulness that among good men is most effective in difficult matters. Hence I immediately granted what you desired for those you commended to us. For I had previously opened up for them the path of hope.

2. I read your books from beginning to end.<sup>1</sup> For they were so far from being dull and uninteresting that they did not allow me to be concerned about anything else. They laid a hand upon me, tore me away from other grounds for worry, and so bound me with their chains—so help me God!—that I did not know what I should admire in them more: the perfection of the priesthood, the teachings of philosophy, the ample knowledge of history, or the charm of eloquence. This last feature can attract even the uneducated so that they do not stop until they have read them to the end and, when they have read them to the end, they ask for more. Impudently stubborn people have been proven wrong, for, even in those ages that they call good, worse events occurred due to hidden factors related to the natural world, and all of them were deceived by their moments of happiness coated with a certain sweetness by which they were carried off not to happiness but to the precipice. But, apart from the perpetual life that they promise to the purest virtues, these commandments of ours and the mysteries of the only and true God alleviate even these worldly evils, which are inevitably going to come

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1. The first three books of *The City of God*.

about, given that we have been born. And you used the very powerful example of the recent disaster,<sup>2</sup> by which you most strongly defended your position; yet if I were permitted to choose one of the two, I would have preferred that it not be there as a help to you. But since a complaint filled with stupidity arose from pagans who had to be refuted, it was necessary to draw from it arguments for the truth.

3. In the meanwhile I wrote this in reply, while occupied with other worries. Though they are vain when we consider the final end of things, they are necessary, given the condition into which we are born. If there were leisure and life were long enough, I would also write about Italy in order to reward a work of such learning with due, though not sufficient, signs of respect. May almighty God keep Your Holiness safe and happy for many years, my rightly venerable and truly lovable father.

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2. The fall of Rome in 410.

## Letter 155

In 413 or 414 Augustine replied to the previous letter from Macedonius. Augustine expresses his delight over Macedonius' love for the happy life, which can be found only in Christ (paragraph 1). He points to the errors of the philosophers who thought that they could achieve happiness by their own efforts and claimed that the wise man is happy, even amid such grave pains that he is forced to commit suicide (paragraph 2). Cicero, for example, spoke of a wise man who was blind and deaf and suffering terrible pains such that he had to take himself from the life he called happy (paragraph 3). For Christians, the happy life is the reward in the next life, if they live this life and endure its evils in the hope of the next (paragraph 4).

True wisdom is the true worship of the true God, which is a gift of God, not due to our talent or merit (paragraph 5). If Macedonius loves true virtue, he should cast off the errors of the philosophers and ask for true virtue from God (paragraph 6). Augustine reminds Macedonius that the happiness of a city is to be found in God, just as is the happiness of an individual (paragraph 7). Augustine uses a psalm to show that the happiness of a people does not come from temporal blessings (paragraph 8). We need to ask the Lord for the virtue to overcome the difficulties of this life (paragraph 9). Macedonius' virtues should not be used merely for the temporal prosperity of those he serves but should be referred to the worship of God (paragraph 10). Augustine worries that he may seem to speak with insufficient respect, but insists that his first fear is to displease God (paragraph 11). If the virtues Macedonius has are true virtues, they will increase by God's help and bring him to virtue's reward of clinging to the highest good (paragraph 12). Even in this life there is no virtue other than to love what we ought to love (paragraph 13). We ought to love God above all else and our neighbor as ourselves, and our neighbor includes everyone human (paragraph 14). We do not need a commandment to love ourselves, since we love ourselves in loving God (paragraph 15). If we lead this life with the virtues that God has given us, we have their eternal reward in the next life (paragraph 16). Piety, then, is the true worship of the true God that brings us through the difficulties of this life to the enjoyment of the highest and everlasting good in the next (paragraph 17).

*Augustine, bishiof and servant of Christ and his family, sends greetings in the Lord to Macedonius, his beloved son.*

1. I. Though I do not recognize in myself the wisdom that you ascribe to me, I am grateful for your great and sincere goodwill toward me, and I ought to be even more grateful. And I am delighted that the labor of my studies pleased so good and so great a man. But I am delighted much more because I recognize that your mind is filled with the love of eternity and of the truth and that the intensity of this love longs for that divine and heavenly city whose king is Christ and in which alone we will live happily forever if we live here correctly and piously. I

am delighted because I see that your mind is drawing near to it and is ablaze with the desire to attain it. From it, of course, there also flows true friendship that is not to be judged by temporal advantages but is to be valued as gratuitous love. For no one can truly be a friend of another person unless he is first a friend of the truth, and if that is not done gratuitously it cannot be done at all.

2. The philosophers have also said much on this topic, but they do not have true piety, that is, the true worship of the true God, from which all the duties of leading a good life must be drawn. The reason for this, to the extent I understand it, is that they themselves wanted to construct a happy life for themselves and thought that they should procure it rather than pray for it, though only God gives it. For only he who made human beings makes them happy. After all, he bestows such great goods upon his creatures, both the good and the bad ones, that they exist, are human beings, are vigorous in their senses, able in their strength, and abounding in riches. He will give himself to the good in order that they may be happy, because it is also his gift that they are happy. But those who in this painful life, in these dying members, under this burden of the corruptible flesh, wanted to be the sources and the creators, as it were, of their own happiness, seeking after it and retaining it as if by their own powers, not asking and hoping for it from that fountain of the virtues, were unable to grasp God, who resists their pride. For this reason they fell into the most absurd error. When they claim that the wise man is happy even in the bull of Phalaris,<sup>1</sup> they are forced to admit that at times we should flee from the happy life. For they yield to the evils of the body that have become excessive, and they decide that they should depart from this life amid their most grievous torments. At this point I do not want to say how great a crime it is for a man to kill himself when he is innocent, since he ought not to, even when he is guilty. In that first of those three books that you read with great kindness and eagerness, we said much on this topic.<sup>2</sup> But at least consider and judge, not with pride but with modesty, how life can be happy if the wise man does not enjoy it when he has it but is forced to leave it by doing violence to himself.

3. There is in Cicero, as you know, in the last part of the fifth book of *Tusculan Disputations*, a passage that should be noted because of what I am saying.<sup>3</sup> For, when he was dealing with bodily blindness and claimed that even a wise man who is blind can be happy, he mentioned many things that he would enjoy perceiving through hearing. So too, if he were deaf, he transferred to the eyes the things in which he would take delight. But if he were deprived of both senses and became both blind and deaf, Cicero did not dare to state his opinion on this and

1. Phalaris, a tyrant of Agrigento, Sicily, in the 6th century B.C., is said to have roasted his victims in a bronze bull. Epicurus taught that a wise man who has conquered the fear of death can be happy even inside the bull of Phalaris.

2. See *The City of God* I, 1727.

3. See Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* (*Disputationes tusculanae*) V, 38, 110-40, 118.

call that man happy. But he also added the worst pains of the body and said that, if they did not kill him, he should kill himself and enter that harbor where no one feels anything once he has been set free by his courage.<sup>4</sup> The wise man, then, yields and succumbs to the worst disasters to the point that he is forced by them to commit murder against himself. Whom would he spare in order to escape those evils if he does not spare himself? Surely he is always happy; surely he cannot by the force of any disaster lose the happy life that lies in his own control. Look, in blindness and deafness and the most atrocious torments of the body he either lost the happy life, or if he is still happy amid these afflictions, the upshot of the disputations of such learned men is that at times the happy life is a life that the wise man cannot endure or—what is even more absurd—that he ought not to endure. Rather, he should flee from that life, break it off, cast it away, and take himself from it by the sword, by poison, or by another voluntary death. In that way he would be utterly non-existent in the harbor where no one feels anything, as the Epicureans and any others of the same stupidity thought, or he is happy because he was set free from that happy life as if from some plague. O the proud presumption! If the life amid bodily torture is happy, why does the wise man not remain in it to enjoy it? But if it is miserable, what, I ask you, but pride keeps him from saying so, from praying to God, from beseeching the just and merciful God? For he is able to turn aside or to lessen the evils of this life or to arm us with courage to face them or to set us entirely free from them and, after this life, to give us the truly happy life. There no evil will be allowed, and there the highest good will never be lost.

4. This is the reward of the pious; in the hope of attaining it we lead this temporal and mortal life not so much with pleasure as with endurance. And we bear its evils bravely with a good heart and by the gift of God when we rejoice over God's faithful promise of eternal goods and over our faithful expectation of them. The apostle Paul exhorted us to this; he said, *Rejoice in hope; be patient in tribulation* (Rom 12:12). For he shows why we should be *patient in tribulation* by prefacing it with the words, *Rejoice in hope*. I exhort you to this hope through Jesus Christ our Lord. For, when the majesty of his godhead was hidden and the weakness of the flesh was seen, God himself, the teacher, not only taught this by the words he spoke but also confirmed it by the example of his passion and resurrection. For in his passion he showed us the sort of things we would have to endure; in his resurrection he showed us the sort of things we ought to hope for. Those philosophers would also merit his grace if they were not exalted and puffed up with pride and did not try in vain to produce the happy life for themselves, something that God alone truthfully promised that he would give to his worshipers after this life. That statement of the same Cicero is certainly sounder

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4. *Ibid.*, V, 40, 117.

where he says, "For this life is indeed a death that I could lament if I wanted."<sup>5</sup> How, then, if this life is rightly lamented, is it shown to be happy? And is it not rather proven to be miserable because it is rightly lamented? Hence, I beg you, my good friend, get used to being happy for now in hope in order that you may also be happy in fact when your most constant piety receives the reward of eternal happiness.

2, 5. If I am a burden to you with a lengthy letter, you surely brought this on yourself when you called me wise. For this reason, after all, I have dared to say these things to you in order to show you not the wisdom that I have but the sort of wisdom that I ought to have. In the present age, however, this wisdom consists in the true worship of the true God in order that in the age to come its enjoyment may be certain and complete. Here there is a most solid piety, there everlasting happiness. If I have anything of this wisdom, which is the one true wisdom, I have received it from God and not presumed to have it from myself. And I hope confidently that he will bring it to completion in me, for I humbly rejoice that he has begun it in me. With regard to what he has not yet given I am not unbelieving, and with regard to what he has already given I am not ungrateful. For it is not by my talent or merit but by his gift that I am what I am, if I am in any way worthy of praise. For certain people with the keenest and most excellent minds have fallen into greater errors to the extent that they ran, as if by their own strength, with more confidence and did not humbly and sincerely ask God to show them the way. But what merits can any human beings have since he who came, not as a reward owed us but as a gratuitous grace, who was alone free from sin and our deliverer, found all of us sinners?

6. If, then, true virtue delights us, let us say to him what we read in his sacred books, *I shall love you, O Lord, my virtue* (Ps 18:2). And if we want to be truly happy, something we cannot fail to want, let us hold on to with a believing heart what we learned in the same books, *Happy is the man for whom the name of the Lord is his hope and who has not searched after vanities and insane lies* (Ps 40:5). But what vanity, what insanity, and what a lie it is that a mortal human being living a painful life with both spirit and flesh subject to change, burdened with so many sins, exposed to so many temptations, subject to so much corruption, and destined for perfectly just punishments, puts his trust in himself in order to be happy, when he cannot preserve from errors even that which he has as most excellent in the dignity of his nature, that is, his mind and reason, unless God, the light of minds, gives his help! Let us, therefore, cast aside the vanities of false philosophers and their insane lies, for we will not have even virtue unless he is there to help us. Nor will we have happiness unless he is there for us to enjoy and by the gift of immortality and incorruptibility he swallows up the whole mutable and corruptible being of ours, which by itself is feeble and a veritable mine of misery.

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5. Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* (*Disputationes tusculanae*) I, 31, 75.



7. But because we know that you love the republic, see how it is clear in those sacred books that a human being is happy from the same source as the city. For in them a certain man filled with the Holy Spirit says in prayer, *Rescue me from the hands of strangers whose lips spoke vanity and whose right hand is the right hand of iniquity. Their sons are like saplings strong in their youth. Their daughters are dressed and adorned like the temple. Their cellars are full and overflowing from here to there. Their sheep are fertile and are becoming many in their births; their cows are fat. Their walls are not crumbling, nor is there a hole, and there is no outcry in their streets. They called the people who have these things happy. Happy are the people who have the Lord as their God* (Ps 144:11-15).

8. You see that a people is not called happy because of the accumulation of earthly happiness except by strangers, that is, by those who have no share in the rebirth by which we become children of God. The psalmist prays that he may be rescued from their hands for fear that he might be drawn by them into this opinion and impious sins. While speaking vanity, they called happy the people who have these things that he mentioned above, in which is found the only happiness that the lovers of this world seek. And for this reason *their right hand is the right hand of iniquity*, because they ranked first these things that they should have ranked lower, just as the right hand is ranked above the left. For, if we possess them, we should not locate the happy life in them; they ought to be ranked below, not above; they should come later, not first. As if we said to the psalmist, who prayed in that way and desired to be rescued and separated from the strangers who *called the people who have these things happy*, "What do you yourself think? Which people do you call happy?" he does not say, "Happy are the people who have virtue of the mind." If he had said this, he would of course also have separated these people from those other people who located the happy life in this visible and bodily happiness, but he would not yet have gone beyond all vanity and insane lies. For, as the same books elsewhere teach, *Cursed is everyone who put his hope in a human being* (Jer 17:5). No one, therefore, ought to put his hope in himself since he too is a human being. Hence, in order to pass beyond the limits of all vanity and insane lies and to locate the happy life where it truly is, he says, *Happy are the people who have the Lord as their God*.

3. 9. You see, then, from whom we should ask for that which all, both the learned and the unlearned, desire, and because of their errors and pride many do not know from whom they should ask for it or where they can receive it. Both kinds of people, however, are reprimanded at the same time in a psalm to God: both those who put their trust in their own virtue and those who boast over the abundance of their riches.<sup>6</sup> That is, both the philosophers of this world and those who hold back from such philosophy call the people happy who have earthly riches. And for this reason let us ask the Lord our God, who made us, for the

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6. See Ps 49:7.

virtue to conquer the evils of this life and for the happy life that we may enjoy after this life in his eternity. In that way both in virtue and in the reward of virtue, as the apostle says, *let one who boasts boast in the Lord* (2 Cor 10:17). Let us desire this for ourselves; let us desire this for the city of which we are citizens. For a city's happiness comes from the same source as a human being's, since a city is nothing but a multitude of human beings with a common goal.

10. And so, if all your prudence, by which you try to provide for human affairs, if all your courage, because of which you are not frightened by the iniquity of any opponent, if all your temperance, by which you hold back from corruption amid the great disgrace of the bad habits of human beings, if all your justice, by which in judging correctly you give each his due, if all these labor for and strive after this goal—I mean that these people whose well-being you desire may be sound in body and safe and secure from the wrongdoing of anyone, that they may have sons like strong saplings and daughters adorned like the temple, that their cellars may be full and overflowing from here and to there, that their sheep may be fertile and their cows fat, that a collapse of a wall may not disfigure their property, and that the outcry of litigation may not be heard in their streets—then your virtues will not be genuine, just as their happiness will not be. Here, after all, that modesty of mine, which you praised with kind words in your letter, ought not to keep me from speaking the truth.<sup>7</sup> If any act of administration on your part, guided by those virtues I mentioned, is determined by the intention of this goal that human beings suffer no unjust troubles in terms of the flesh, and if you do not think it is your concern how they use this peace that you strive to give them, that is, to speak plainly, how they should worship the true God where there is found the whole benefit of a peaceful life, that great labor does you no good for the truly happy life.

11. I seem to say this with not enough respect and to have forgotten somehow the manner of my intercessions. But if respect is nothing but the fear of causing displeasure, I am not afraid when I fear in this case. After all, I rightly fear to be displeasing first of all to God and then to the friendship you have deigned to enter into with me, if I am less frank in admonishing you about what I judge because I admonish you to a most salutary purpose. Surely I may be more respectful when I intercede with you on behalf of others, but when I intercede on your own behalf I am franker to the extent I am more your friend because I am more your friend the more loyal I am. And yet I would not say these things if I were not acting with more respect. If this were not, as you wrote in your letter, “most effective for resolving difficulties among good men,” may God help me with you on your behalf in order that I may enjoy you in him who has offered me this confident access to you, especially since I think that what I suggest is already easy to do for your mind, which is aided and instructed by so many gifts of God.

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7. See Letter 154, 10.

12. For, if you realize from whom you received the virtues you have received and thank him, you would use them for his worship, even in these worldly honors you have, and you would raise up and draw human beings subject to your authority to worship him by the example of your religious life and by your zeal in providing for them, whether by showing them favor or by causing them fear. And in the life that they live in great security because of you, you would want nothing else than that, because of it, they may merit him with whom they may live in happiness. And those virtues will be true virtues and, by the help of him by whose bounty they were given, they will grow and become perfect so that they will without any doubt bring you to the truly happy life, which is none other than eternal life. In it prudence will not distinguish evil, which will not exist, from what is good, nor will courage endure adversity, because we will find there only what we love, not what we endure, nor will temperance bridle desire where we will not feel its enticements. Nor will justice aid the needy with help where we will have no one poor and needy. In that life there will be only one virtue, and it will be both virtue and the reward of virtue, something that one who loves this says in the holy writings, *But for me it is good to cling to God (Ps 73:28)*. There this will be complete and everlasting wisdom, and this same wisdom will also be the truly happy life. It is, of course, the attainment of the eternal and highest good, and to cling to it for eternity is the goal that holds all our good. This might be called prudence because it will with perfect foresight cling to the good that will not be lost. It might be called courage because it will most firmly cling to the good that will not be torn away. It might be called temperance because it will most chastely cling to the good by which it will not be corrupted. And it might be called justice because it will with full righteousness cling to the good to which it is rightly subject.

4. 13. And yet even in this life there is no virtue but to love what one should love. To choose it is prudence; to be turned away from it by no difficulties is courage; to be turned away from it by no enticement is temperance; to be turned away from it by no pride is justice. But what should we choose that we should especially love except that than which we find nothing better? This is God, and if in loving him we prefer something else or make it equal to God, we do not know how to love ourselves. For we are better off to the extent that we advance more toward him than whom nothing is better. But we advance not by walking but by loving. We shall have him more present to the extent that we can maintain more purely the same love by which we tend toward him. For he is neither stretched out nor enclosed in bodily places. We may advance toward him who is present everywhere and whole everywhere, therefore, not by our feet but by our actions. Our actions, however, are usually judged not on the basis of what each of us knows but on the basis of what each of us loves, and only good or bad loves make good or bad actions. Because of our wrongdoing, then, we are far from the rectitude of God; hence, by loving what is right we are corrected in order that, as upright, we may cling to what is right.

14. Let us, then, work with as much effort as we can so that those whom we love as we love ourselves may attain him, if we know how to love ourselves in loving him. For Christ, that is, the Truth, says that the whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments, namely, that we love God with our whole heart, our whole soul, and our whole mind and that we love our neighbors as ourselves.<sup>8</sup> We should, of course, judge who our neighbor is in this passage not on the basis of blood relationship but on the basis of our sharing in the society of reason, in which all human beings are united. For if the bond of money unites people, how much more does the bond of nature unite them, which they share not by the law of exchange but by that of birth! For this reason that famous comic playwright—for the splendor of the truth is not lacking to brilliant minds—has one old man say to another:

Do you have so much leisure from your own affairs  
that you busy yourself about the affairs of others  
that are none of your concern?

And he added the response from the other:

I am a human being; I do not regard anything human  
as of no concern to me.<sup>9</sup>

They say that whole theaters, full of stupid and ignorant people, applauded that idea. The union of human minds naturally stirs the love of all human beings so that each human being in it feels that he is a neighbor of any other.

15. And though with that love, which God's law commands, a man ought to love God, himself, and his neighbor, still we were not given three commandments on this account. Nor was it said, "On these three," but, *On these two commandments the whole law and the prophets depend*, that is, on the love of God from one's whole heart, from one's whole soul, and from one's whole mind, and of one's neighbor as oneself. In that way we were, of course, meant to understand that there is no other love by which one loves himself but that by which he loves God. For one who loves himself in another way should rather be said to hate himself. He, of course, becomes unjust and is deprived of the light of justice when he turns away from the better and higher good, for, even if he turns from it toward himself, he certainly turns toward lower and lesser goods. The words of scripture are realized in him: *But he who loves injustice hates his own soul* (Ps 11:6). Because, then, no one loves himself except by loving God, there was no need that a human being also receive a command to love himself after he had been given the commandment about the love of God, since in loving God he loves himself. He ought, then, to love his neighbor as himself in order that by consoling him through beneficence, by teaching him through doctrine, or by

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8. See Mt 22:37-38.

9. Terence, *Heautontim.* I, 1, 75-77.

restraining him through discipline he may bring everyone he can to worship God, since he knows that on these two commandments the whole law and the prophets depend.

16. One who chooses this with careful discernment is prudent; one who is not turned aside from this by any affliction is courageous; one who is not turned aside from this by any delight is temperate; and one who is not turned aside by any pride is just. By these virtues given by God through the grace of Jesus Christ, the mediator, who is God with the Father and man with us,<sup>10</sup> through whom we are reconciled to God in the Spirit of love after the enmities of sin—I repeat, with these virtues given by God we now live a good life, and afterwards we will be given its reward, the happy life, which can only be eternal life. For the same virtues are practiced here and will have their result there. Here they involve work; there they will be our reward. Here they are our duty; there they will be the end we attain. And so all good and holy people, even amid torments of every sort, supported by God's help, are called happy because of the hope for that end, the end in which they will be happy. For, if they were always in the same torments and the fiercest pains, no sound mind would doubt that they were miserable no matter what virtues they had.

17. Piety, then, that is, the true worship of the true God, is useful for everything.<sup>11</sup> It both turns aside and eases the troubles of this life and leads to that life where we will no longer suffer anything evil but will enjoy the highest and everlasting good. I exhort you, as I exhort myself, to attain that piety more perfectly and to hold on to it with great perseverance. If you did not already have a share in it and did not judge that these temporal honors of yours ought to be used in his service, you would not say to the Donatist heretics in order to restore them to the unity and peace of Christ, "On your behalf we do this; on your behalf the priests of inviolate faith labor; on your behalf the august emperor labors; on your behalf we too, his judges, labor," and many other things that you put in the same edict in order that it might be seen that in the garb of an earthly judge you have in mind to no small degree the heavenly fatherland. Hence, if I chose to converse with you longer concerning true virtues and the truly happy life, I ask that you not consider me a burden for your work. In fact, I am confident that I am not, since you have so great a mind and one so wonderfully praiseworthy that you do not abandon those concerns and you occupy yourself with these more willingly and frequently.

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10. See 1 Tm 2:5.

11. See 1 Tm 4:8.



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(prepared by Michael Dolan)

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(prepared by Kathleen Strattan)

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