

Book One

There are two things on which all interpretation of scripture depends: the process of discovering what we need to learn, and the process of presenting what we have learnt. I shall discuss the process of discovery first,⁵⁷ and then that of presentation. This is a great and arduous task,⁵⁸ difficult to sustain and also, I fear, a rash one to undertake; or so it would be if I were trusting in my own resources. But since in fact my hope of completing the work is based on God, from whom I already have much relevant material through meditation, I have no need to worry that he will fail to supply the remainder when I begin to share what has been given to me. 2. For everything which does not give out when given away is not yet possessed in the way in which it should be possessed, while it is possessed and not given away. God says, ‘the man who has will be given more’.⁵⁹ He will give to those who have: this means that for those who make generous use of what they have received he will supplement and increase what he has given. One person had five loaves, and another had seven before the loaves began to be distributed to the hungry, but once the distribution had begun, they managed to fill baskets and hampers even after satisfying so many thousands of people.⁶⁰ 3. So just like the bread, which increased as it was broken, the material which God has already supplied to me for starting this work will be multiplied, through his own provision, when discussion of it begins. So in this act of service I will not only experience no shortage of material, but rather enjoy an astonishing abundance of it.

4. All teaching is teaching of either things or signs, but things are learnt through signs. What I now call things in the strict sense are things such as logs, stones, sheep, and so on, which are not employed to signify something; but I do not include the log which we read that Moses threw into the bitter waters to make them lose their bitter taste,⁶¹ or the stone which

⁵⁷ ‘Discovery’ or *inventio* is a technical term of classical rhetoric, defined as ‘the devising of true or plausible matter to make a case convincing’ (*Rhet. Her.* 1. 2. 3). Augustine changes its sense significantly.

⁵⁸ *Magnum onus et arduum* : cf. Cic. *Orat.* 33 (but with *opus*), which is exactly quoted at the beginning of *Civ. Dei*.

⁵⁹ Matt. 13: 12.

⁶⁰ Matt. 14: 17–21; 15: 34–8.

⁶¹ Exod. 15: 25.

Jacob placed under his head,⁶⁵ or the sheep which Abraham sacrificed in place of his son.⁶⁶ These are things, but they are at the same time signs of other things. 5. There are other signs whose whole function consists in signifying.⁶⁷ Words, for example: nobody uses words except in order to signify something. From this it may be understood what I mean by signs: those things which are employed to signify something. So every sign is also a thing, since what is not a thing does not exist. But it is not true that every thing is also a sign. 6. Therefore in my distinction of things and signs, when I speak of things, I shall speak of them in such a way that even if some of them can be employed to signify they do not impair the arrangement by which I will treat things first and signs later. And we must be careful to remember that what is under consideration at this stage is the fact that things exist, not that they signify something else besides themselves.

7. There are some things which are to be enjoyed, some which are to be used, and some whose function is both to enjoy and use. Those which are to be enjoyed make us happy; those which are to be used assist us and give us a boost, so to speak, as we press on towards our happiness, so that we may reach and hold fast to the things which make us happy. And we, placed as we are among things of both kinds, both enjoy and use them; but if we choose to enjoy things that are to be used, our advance is impeded and sometimes even diverted, and we are held back, or even put off, from attaining things which are to be enjoyed, because we are hamstrung by our love of lower things.

8. To enjoy something is to hold fast to it in love for its own sake. To use something is to apply whatever it may be to the purpose of obtaining what you love—if indeed it is something that ought to be loved. (The improper use of something should be termed abuse.) Suppose we were travellers who could live happily only in our homeland, and because our absence made us unhappy we wished to put an end to our misery and return to our homeland: we would need transport by land or sea which we could use to travel to our homeland, the object of our enjoyment. But if we were fascinated by the delights of the journey and the actual travelling, we would be perversely enjoying things that we should be using; and we would be reluctant to finish our journey quickly, being ensnared in the

⁶⁵ Gen. 28: 11.

⁶⁶ Gen. 22: 13

⁶⁷ See 2. 1–8.

wrong kind of pleasure and estranged⁷⁴ from the homeland whose pleasures could make us happy. 9. So in this mortal life we are like travellers away from our Lord:⁷⁵ if we wish to return to the homeland where we can be happy we must use this world,⁷⁶ not enjoy it, in order to discern ‘the invisible attributes of God, which are understood through what has been made’⁷⁷ or, in other words, to ascertain what is eternal and spiritual from corporeal and temporal things.

10. The things which are to be enjoyed, then, are the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and the Trinity comprised by them, which is a kind of single, supreme thing, shared by all who enjoy it—if indeed it is a thing and not the cause of all things, and if indeed it is a cause. It is not easy to find a suitable name for such excellence, but perhaps the Trinity is better called the one God from whom, through whom, and in whom everything is.⁷⁸ 11. There is the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit—each one of these is God, and all of them together are one God; each of these is a full substance and all together are one substance. The Father is neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit, the Son is neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son, but the Father is purely the Father, the Son purely the Son, and the Holy Spirit purely the Holy Spirit. 12. These three have the same eternal nature, the same unchangeableness, the same majesty, the same power. In the Father there is unity, in the Son equality, and in the Holy Spirit a harmony of unity and equality. And the three are all one because of the Father, all equal because of the Son, and all in harmony because of the Holy Spirit.

Trinity

13. Have I spoken something, have I uttered something, worthy of God? No, I feel that all I have done is to wish to speak; if I did say something, it is not what I wanted to say. How do I know this? Simply because God is unspeakable. But what I have spoken would not have been spoken if it were unspeakable. For this reason God should not even be called unspeakable, because even when this word is spoken, something is spoken. There is a kind of conflict between words here:⁷⁹ if what cannot be spoken is unspeakable, then it is not unspeakable, because it can actually be said to be unspeakable. It is better to evade this verbal conflict silently than to quell it disputatiously. 14. Yet although nothing can be spoken in a

⁷⁴ On the history of the concept of *alienatio* and Augustine's use of the idea, see R. A. Markus in *Texte and Untersuchungen*, 94 (Studia Patristica 9, 1966), 431–50.

⁷⁵ 2 Cor. 5: 6.

⁷⁶ Cf. 1 Cor. 7: 31.

⁷⁷ Rom. 1: 20.

⁷⁸ Rom. 11: 36.

⁷⁹ Cf. Plotinus, *Enn.* 5. 3. 14.

way worthy of God, he has sanctioned the homage of the human voice, and chosen that we should derive pleasure from our words in praise of him. Hence the fact that he is called God: he himself is not truly known by the sound of these two syllables,⁸⁴ yet when the word strikes our ears it leads all users of the Latin language to think of a supremely excellent and immortal being.

15. Now although he alone is thought of as the god of gods, he is also thought of by those who imagine, invoke, and worship other gods, whether in heaven or on earth, in so far as their thinking strives to reach a being than which there is nothing better or more exalted. They are, to be sure, inspired by various ideas of excellence, of which some relate to the senses, and others to the intellect, and accordingly those who are devoted to the bodily senses⁸⁵ think that either the sky itself, or the brightest element that they see in the sky, or the world itself, is the god of gods. If they try to pass beyond the visible world, they envisage something bright, and in their futile imaginations represent it either as an infinite being or as one endowed with what they see as ultimate beauty; or else they think of the figure of a human body, if they value that above all else. 16. If they do not believe in a single god of gods, but rather in many gods, or gods without number, all of them having equal status, then for these too they form a mental picture which corresponds to their various ideas of bodily excellence. Those who strive to behold the nature of God through their intellect⁸⁶ place him above all visible and corporeal beings, indeed above all intelligible and spiritual beings, and above all beings that are subject to change. But they all vigorously contend for the excellence of God; it is impossible to find anyone who believes that God is a thing than which there exists something better. All, then, are agreed that what they value above all other things is God.

17. And since all who think of God think of something alive, the only thinkers whose conceptions of God are not absurd and unworthy can be those who think of life itself. Whatever corporeal form occurs to them, they establish that it either lives⁸⁷ or does not live; and they esteem what lives more highly than what does not. They understand that the living corporeal form,

⁸⁴ Latin *deus* has two syllables.

⁸⁵ This category takes in the pre-Socratic philosophers, Plato, Aristotle, Stoics, and Epicureans, as well as popular belief.

⁸⁶ Especially the neo-Platonists (cf. 2. 144), whose doctrines are prominent in the following paragraphs.

⁸⁷ The manuscript readings *vita* ('with life') and *vitam* seem otiose with *vivere*, and premature in view of the distinction made later in this paragraph. I suspect a misreading of *vel* ('either'), or a gloss.

however outstanding its light, however outstanding its size, however outstanding its beauty, consists of two separate things, namely itself and the life by which it is energized; and they raise that life above the mass which is energized and activated by it to a position of unrivalled status. 18. Then they proceed to examine that life, and if they find it has energy but not sense (as in the case of trees) they subordinate it to a sentient form of life (like that of livestock), and they subordinate that in turn to an intelligent form of life (like that of humans). Realizing the mutability of human life, they are obliged to subordinate that too to some unchangeable form of life, namely the life which is not intermittently wise but rather is wisdom itself.⁹² 19. A wise mind (in other words, one that has acquired wisdom) was not wise before it acquired wisdom; but wisdom itself was never unwise, and never can be.⁹³ If they did not see this, they could not, with such complete confidence, subordinate the changeable form of life to a form of life that was unchangeably wise. They certainly see that the actual standard of truth,⁹⁴ by which they maintain the superiority of that life, is not subject to change, and they can only see this as belonging to a realm above their own nature, since they see themselves to be subject to change. 20. Nobody is so brazenly stupid as to say, 'how do you know that the form of life that is unchangeably wise is to be ranked more highly than the changeable form?'. The answer to his question, about how I know, is publicly and unchangeably present for all to behold. Anyone who fails to see this is like a blind man in the sun, who cannot be helped by the brightness of such a clear and powerful light shining into his eyes. 21. But anyone who sees this yet runs away from it has a mind whose insight is weakened by his habit of living in the shadows cast by the flesh. Those, then, who follow what is secondary and inferior to whatever they admit to be superior and more outstanding are, as it were, blown away from their homeland by the adverse winds of their own perverted characters. 22. Since, therefore, we must enjoy to the full that truth which lives unchangeably, and since, within it, God the Trinity, the author and creator of everything, takes thought for the things that he has created, our minds must be purified⁹⁵ so that they are able to perceive that light and then hold fast to it.

⁹² Cf. *Conf.* 7. 17. 23 (Augustine's 'ascent').

⁹³ Cf. Plotinus, *Enn.* 5. 9. 2 (of Intellect).

⁹⁴ Cf. *Ibid.* 1. 3. 5 (ἐκ ἀνώγει τοῦ ἀληθοῦς), equivalent in its context to the rules of logic.

⁹⁵ Cf. *Ibid.* 3. 6. 5, 1. 6. 9.

Let us consider this process of cleansing as a trek, or a voyage, to our homeland;¹⁰⁴ though progress towards the one who is ever present is not made through space, but through goodness of purpose and character. 23. This we would be unable to do, if wisdom itself had not deigned to adapt to our great weakness and offered us a pattern for living; and it has done so actually in human form because we too are human. But because we act wisely when we come to wisdom, wisdom has been thought by arrogant people to have somehow acted foolishly when it came to us; and because we recover strength when we come to wisdom, wisdom has been reckoned as being somehow weak when it came to us. But ‘the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men’.¹⁰⁵ So although it is actually our homeland, it has also made itself the road to our homeland. 24. And although wisdom is everywhere present to the inner eye that is healthy and pure, it deigned to appear even to the carnal eyes of those whose inner eye was weak and impure. For because ‘in the wisdom of God the world was incapable of recognizing God through its wisdom, it pleased God to save those who believe through the foolishness of preaching’.¹⁰⁶ 25. It is not, then, by coming in a spatial sense but by appearing to mortals in mortal flesh that wisdom is said to have come to us. So it came to where it already was, because ‘it was in this world and the world was made through it’.¹⁰⁷ But since human beings, assimilated as they were to this world¹⁰⁸ because of their desire to enjoy the created order instead of its actual creator—and so very aptly described by the word ‘world’—did not recognize it, the evangelist said, ‘and the world did not recognize it’.¹⁰⁹ So, ‘in the wisdom of God, the world was incapable of recognizing God through wisdom’.¹¹⁰ What then, since he was here already, was the reason for his coming, if not that it pleased God to save those who believed through the foolishness of preaching? 26. And what was the manner of his coming, if not this: ‘The word was made flesh and lived among us.’¹¹¹ When we speak, the word which we hold in our mind becomes a sound in order that what we have in our mind may pass through ears of flesh into the listener’s mind: this is called speech. Our thought, however, is not converted into the same sound, but remains intact in its own home, suffering no diminution from

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Plotinus, *Enn.* 1. 6. 8, a favourite passage of Augustine.

¹⁰⁵ 1 Cor. 1: 25.

¹⁰⁶ 1 Cor. 1: 21.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. John 1: 10.

¹⁰⁸ Rom. 12: 2.

¹⁰⁹ John 1: 10.

¹¹⁰ 1 Cor. 1: 21.

¹¹¹ John 1: 14.

its change¹¹³ as it takes on the form of a word in order to make its way into the ears. In the same way the word of God suffered no change although it became flesh in order to live in us.

27. The way to health is through medical care; God's care has taken it upon itself to heal and restore sinners by the same methods. When doctors bind wounds, they do this not just anyhow, but in an appropriate manner, so that the effectiveness of the ligature is matched by a kind of beauty; similarly the treatment given by wisdom was adapted to our wounds by its acceptance of human nature, healing sometimes by the principle of contrariety, sometimes by that of similarity. 28. A doctor treating a physical wound applies some medications that are contrary—a cold one to a hot wound, a dry one to a wet wound, and so on—and also some that are similar, such as a round bandage to a round wound and a rectangular bandage to a rectangular wound, and he does not apply the same ligature to all wounds, but matches like with like. So for the treatment of human beings God's wisdom—in itself both doctor and medicine—offered itself in a similar way. Because human beings fell through pride it used humility in healing them. We were deceived by the wisdom of the serpent; we are freed by the foolishness of God. 29. But just as that was called wisdom yet was foolishness to those who despise God, so this so-called foolishness is wisdom to those who overcome the devil. We made bad use of immortality, and so we died; Christ made good use of mortality, and so we live. The disease entered through a corrupted female mind; healing emerged from an intact female body. Also relevant to the principle of contrariety is the fact that our vices too are treated by the example of his virtues. 30. Examples of similarity in the kinds of bandages (as it were) applied to our limbs and wounds are these: it was one born of a woman that freed those deceived by a woman; it was a mortal man that freed mortals; and it was by death that he freed the dead. Careful consideration of many other such things—as may be done by those who are not hard pressed by the need to finish a book—reveals that the basic principle of Christian healing is one of contrariety and similarity.

31. Now the belief in the Lord's resurrection from the dead and his ascent into heaven reinforces our faith with a great hope. For it clearly testifies how willingly he laid down his life

¹¹³ Cf. *Conf.* 7. 11, 17, of God, based on *Wisd.* 7: 27, and on the relation of words and the Word, *De Trin.* 15. 14. 23–16. 26.

for us,¹²¹ since he had it in his power to take it up again. What great confidence do believers have to buttress their hopes, when they consider the mighty things that such a mighty one suffered for those who did not yet believe! And as he is expected to come from heaven as judge of the living and the dead, he instils great fear into the uncommitted, so that they may develop a serious commitment and yearn for him in lives of goodness rather than fear him in lives of wickedness. 32. For what words can express, what thoughts conceive, the reward which he is going to give at the end, seeing that he has already given us, to support us on our journey, so much of his spirit, in order that in the troubles of this life we may have this enormous confidence and delight in one whom we do not yet behold, and seeing that he has also bestowed individual gifts for the consolidation of his church,¹²² in order that we may perform the tasks that he has indicated not only without murmuring but even with positive enjoyment? 33. The church is his body, as the teaching of the apostle shows;¹²³ it is also called his bride.¹²⁴ So he ties together his own body, with its many members who perform different tasks,¹²⁵ in a bond of unity and love like a healing bandage. And at the present time he trains it and purges it by means of various disagreeable medicines so that when it has been saved from the world he may take as his wife for eternity 'the church, which has no spot or wrinkle or any such thing'.¹²⁶

34. Furthermore, given that we are on a road—a spiritual road, not a spatial one—and one blocked as it were by thorny hedgerows, flourishing through the evil influences of our earlier sins—could he who chose to lay himself down as the way by which we could return have done anything more generous and merciful than to forgive the converted all their sins and, by being crucified for us, pull out the firmly fixed barriers to our return? 35. He accordingly gave keys to his church so that whatever it loosed on earth should also be loosed in heaven, and whatever it bound on earth should also be bound in heaven.¹²⁷ So that if anyone does not believe that his sins are forgiven in God's church they are not forgiven, but if anyone does believe and reform, turning from them to the right way, he is healed, within the bosom of the same church, by the very act of believing and reform. A person who does not believe that his

¹²¹ Cf. John 10: 18

¹²² 1 Cor. 12: 7.

¹²³ Eph. 1: 23.

¹²⁴ Eph. 5: 22.

¹²⁵ Cf. Rom. 12: 4.

¹²⁶ Eph. 5: 27.

¹²⁷ Matt. 16: 19.

sins can be forgiven is made worse by despair, feeling that nothing better awaits him than to be wicked, since he has no faith in the results of being converted.

36. Now just as the abandonment of one's earlier life and behavior, which comes by repentance, is a sort of death of the soul, so too the dissolution of one's former mode of existence is the death of the body. And just as the soul is reformed after repentance, by which the soul kills off its earlier evil character, so we must believe and hope that after this death, to which we are all liable by the bondage of sin, the body is changed to something better at the time of resurrection, with the result, not that flesh and blood take over the kingdom of heaven¹³³—this is impossible—but that this corruptible thing will put on incorruptibility and this mortal thing immortality,¹³⁴ and that without making any trouble (for it will experience no deprivation) it will be energized by the blessed and perfect soul in supreme tranquillity.

37. If a person's soul does not die to the present world and begin to be conformed to the truth, it is drawn by the death of the body into a worse death and reborn not to experience a new heavenly state but to suffer the retribution of punishment. 38. This is contained in our faith, and this, we must believe, is the real situation: neither the soul nor the human body suffers total destruction, but the wicked rise to unthinkable agony, the good to eternal life.

39. Among all these things, then, it is only the eternal and unchangeable things which I mentioned that are to be enjoyed; other things are to be used so that we may attain the full enjoyment of those things. We ourselves who enjoy and use other things are things. A human being is an important kind of thing, being made 'in the image and likeness of God'¹³⁵ not by virtue of having a mortal body but by virtue of having a rational soul and thus a higher status than animals. 40. It is therefore an important question, whether humans should enjoy one another or use one another, or both.¹³⁶ We have been commanded to love one another,¹³⁷ but the question is whether one person should be loved by another on his own account or for some other reason. If on his own account, we enjoy him; if for another reason, we use him. In my opinion, he should be loved for another reason. For if something is to be loved on its own

¹³³ 1 Cor. 15: 50.

¹³⁴ 1 Cor. 15: 53.

¹³⁵ Gen. 1: 26–7.

¹³⁶ For a careful study of this and other questions in what follows, see O. O'Donovan 'Usus and Fructus' in Augustine *De Doctrina Christiana* I, *Journal of Theological Studies*, NS, 33 (1982), 361–97.

¹³⁷ John 13: 34; 15: 12, 17.

account, it is made to constitute the happy life, even if it is not as yet the reality but the hope of it which consoles us at this time. But 'cursed is he who puts his hope in a man'.¹⁴⁰

41. Neither should a person enjoy himself, if you think closely about this, because he should not love himself on his own account, but only on account of the one who is to be enjoyed. A person is at his best when in his whole life he strives towards the unchangeable form of life and holds fast to it wholeheartedly. But if he loves himself on his own account, he does not relate himself to God, but turns to himself and not to something unchangeable. And for this reason it is with a certain insufficiency that he enjoys himself, because when totally absorbed and controlled by the unchangeable good he is a better man than when his attention leaves it, even if it turns to himself. 42. So if you ought to love yourself not on your own account but on account of the one who is the most proper object of your love, another person should not be angry if you love him too on account of God. For the divinely established rule of love says 'you shall love your neighbour as yourself' but God 'with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind',¹⁴¹ so that you may devote all your thoughts and all your life and all your understanding to the one from whom you actually receive the things that you devote to him. 43. And when it says 'all your heart, all your soul, all your mind', it leaves no part of our life free from this obligation, no part free as it were to back out and enjoy some other thing; any other object of love that enters the mind should be swept towards the same goal as that to which the whole flood of our love is directed. So a person who loves his neighbour properly should, in concert with him, aim to love God with all his heart, all his soul, and all his mind. In this way, loving him as he would himself, he relates his love of himself and his neighbour entirely to the love of God, which allows not the slightest trickle to flow away from it and thereby diminish it.

44. It is not the case that all things which are to be used are to be loved; but only those which exist in some kind of association with us and are related to God, like a man or an angel, or which, being related to us, stand in need of the kindness of God as received through us, like the body. The martyrs, certainly, did not love the crime of those who persecuted them, but used

¹⁴⁰ Jer. 17: 5.

¹⁴¹ Matt. 22: 39, 37.

it to win their way to God. 45. There are four things that are to be loved—one, that which is above us; two, that which we are; three, that which is close to us; four, that which is beneath us. No commandments needed to be given about the second and fourth of these. For however much a man may lapse from the truth,¹⁴⁶ he retains a love of himself and a love of his own body. The mind which shuns the unchangeable light which is sovereign over all aims to exercise sovereignty over itself and its body, and so cannot fail to love both itself and its body.

46. And it thinks it has achieved something great if it can also dominate its peers, by which I mean other men. For it is the instinct of a corrupt mind to covet and claim as its due what is really due to God alone. This kind of self-love is better called hatred. It is unjust because it wants what is beneath it to serve it while itself refusing to serve what is above it; and it has been very well said that ‘the person who loves injustice hates his own soul’.¹⁴⁷ For this reason such a mind becomes weak and is tormented because of its mortal body, 47. for it is inevitable that it should love the body and be weighed down by the body's corruption. A body's immortality and immunity from corruption derives from health of mind, and health of mind means resolutely holding fast to something better, namely the unchangeable God. But when it aspires to dominate those who are its natural peers, that is, its fellow-men, its arrogance is quite intolerable.

48. So nobody hates himself. On this point there has never been any dispute with any sect. But neither does anyone hate his own body. What the apostle said is true: ‘no-one ever felt hatred for his own body.’¹⁴⁸ Some say that they would prefer not to have a body at all, but they are mistaken. For what they hate is not their body, but its imperfections and its dead weight. 49. What they want is not to have no body at all, but to have one free from corruption and totally responsive; they think that if the body were such a thing it would not be a body, because they consider such a thing to be a soul. When they seem to persecute their own body by a kind of repression, and by hardships, their aim (if they are doing it rightly) is not to have no body at all but to have one that is subservient and ready for necessary tasks. 50. It is the lusts which misuse the body—in other words, the habits and inclinations of a soul¹⁴⁹ to enjoy what

¹⁴⁶ Cf. 2 Tim. 2: 18.

¹⁴⁷ Ps. 10: 6(11: 5).

¹⁴⁸ Eph. 5: 29.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. *Conf.* 7. 17. 23. The reading *inclinationis* of some manuscripts is surely not right, but could be a corruption of *inclinatoris* (‘more inclined’); this would recall *Conf.* 7. 17. 21. But the manuscript reading adopted here gives a better description of *libidines*.

is inferior—that they are trying to eliminate by this strenuous drilling of the body itself. After all, they do not kill themselves, and have some concern for their health.

51. Those who have this misguided aim are waging war on their body as if it were a natural enemy. They are misled by their reading of the words ‘the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh; for these are in conflict with each other’.¹⁵³ These words were spoken because of the ungovernable habits of the flesh, against which the spirit lusts not in order to destroy the body but to make it subservient to the spirit, as our nature demands, by taming its lusts, that is, its evil habits. 52. For since it will be the case after the resurrection that the body will live for ever in a state of utmost tranquillity and total subservience to the spirit, it should be our concern in this life that the tendency of the flesh is reformed and not allowed to resist the spirit with its unruly impulses. But until this happens, the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh. The spirit fights back not out of hatred, but to establish its primacy, because it wants the body it loves to be subservient to something better; nor does the flesh fight back out of hatred, but because of the stranglehold of these habits which, after establishing themselves in the stock of our ancestors, have become naturally ingrained. 53. The spirit’s aim in subduing the flesh is to break the perverse contracts¹⁵⁴ (so to speak) of these evil habits and establish the peace brought by good habits. Even those who are corrupted by false ideas and hate their bodies would not be prepared to lose one eye, even painlessly, and even if the sight remaining in the other eye were as good as the sight that there had been in both, unless they were constrained by some greater necessity. This and other arguments make it clear enough to those who seek the truth without prejudice that the apostle’s judgement was sound when he said ‘no-one ever felt hatred for his own body’.¹⁵⁵ And he added, ‘but one feeds it and looks after it, as Christ did to the church’.

54. Human beings must also be told how to love, that is, how to love themselves so as to do themselves good. (It would be absurd to doubt that anyone wishes to love himself and do himself good.) They must also be told how to love their own bodies so as to look after them systematically and sensibly; for it is equally obvious that one loves one’s own body and wants it

¹⁵³ Gal. 5: 17.

¹⁵⁴ A favourite notion, used in different ways in 2. 74–95 and *Conf.* 1. 18. 29.

¹⁵⁵ Eph. 5: 29.

to be healthy and sound. 55. Now it is possible to love something more than the health and soundness of one's own body. It is well known that many people have voluntarily undergone pain and the amputation of limbs in order to obtain other things which they valued more. But it should not be said that someone does not value his body's health and safety just because he values something else more highly. 56. A miser buys himself bread in spite of the fact that he loves money; in doing so he gives away the money which he loves so much and wants to have more of, but he does this because he puts a greater value on the health of his body, which needs the bread for its sustenance. It is pointless to discuss such an obvious point further—though the heresy of the wicked often leaves us with no choice.

57. There is, then, no need to be instructed to love oneself and one's body; we love what we are and what is inferior to us but belongs to us, according to an immovable unvarying natural law, one which was also made for animals, because even animals love themselves and their bodies. It therefore remains for us to receive instruction about what is above us and what is close to us. Scripture says, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind', and, 'you shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend the entire law and the prophets.'¹⁵⁹ 58. The aim of the commandment is love,¹⁶⁰ a double love of God and of one's neighbour. But if you understand by this your whole person—mind and body—and your whole neighbour—that is, his mind and body, for a person consists of mind and body—no class of things to be loved is missing from these two commandments. Although love of God comes first and the manner of loving him is clearly laid down, in such a way that everything else flows into it, nothing seems to have been said about self-love. But when it is said 'you shall love your neighbour as yourself', your own self-love is not neglected.

59. The person who lives a just and holy life is one who is a sound judge of these things. He is also a person who has ordered his love,¹⁶¹ so that he does not love what it is wrong to love, or fail to love what should be loved, or love too much what should be loved less < or love too little what should be loved

¹⁵⁹ Matt. 22: 37–40. W. M. Green (*REA* 8 (1962) 228–9) believed that here and in 1. 67 *omnes* ('all', qualifying 'prophets'), which is read by many manuscripts and present as an early correction in the St Petersburg manuscript, was added by Augustine himself, correcting the biblical version with which he was familiar. This seems unlikely, and is not supported by his other quotations of the verse, which do not include *omnes*.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. 1 Tim. 1: 5.

¹⁶¹ On the notion of 'ordered' love see Oliver O'Donovan, *The Problem of Self-love in St. Augustine*, (New Haven, Conn., 1980), 24–32.

more) ,¹⁶⁴ or love two things equally if one of them should be loved either less or more than the other, or love things either more or less if they should be loved equally. Every sinner, *qua* sinner, should not be loved; every human being, *qua* human being, should be loved on God's account; and God should be loved for himself. 60. And if God is to be loved more than any human being, each person should love God more than he loves himself. Likewise, another human being should be loved more than our own bodies, because all these things are to be loved on account of God whereas another person can enjoy God together with us in a way in which the body cannot, since the body lives only through the soul, and it is the soul by which we enjoy God.

61. All people should be loved equally. But you cannot do good to all people equally, so you should take particular thought for those who by the chance of place or time or anything else are, as if by lot, in particularly close contact with you. 62. Suppose that you had plenty of something which had to be given to someone in need of it but could not be given to two people, and you met two people, neither of whom had a greater need or a closer relationship to you than the other: you could do nothing more just than to choose by lot the person to whom you should give what could not be given to both. Analogously, since you cannot take thought for all men, you must settle by lot in favour of the one who happens to be more closely associated with you in temporal matters.

63. Of all those who are capable of enjoying God together with us, we love some whom we are helping, and some who are helping us; some whose help we need and some whose needs we are meeting; some to whom we give no benefit and some by whom we do not expect any benefit to be given to us. But it should be our desire that they all love God together with us, and all the help that we give to or receive from them must be related to this one end. 64. In the theatre—that den of wickedness¹⁶⁵—someone who loves an actor and revels in his skill as if it were a great good, or even the supreme one, also loves all those who share his love, not on their account, but on account of the one they equally love. The more passionate he is in his love, the more he tries by whatever methods he can to make his hero loved by a greater number of people, and the

¹⁶⁴ These words are not present in the manuscripts, but surely needed; the omission is more likely to be a scribe's fault than Augustine's.

¹⁶⁵ A common complaint: cf. 2. 71.

more he desires to point him out to a greater number of people. If he sees someone unenthusiastic he rouses him as much as he can with his praises. If he finds anyone antagonistic, he violently hates that person's hatred of his hero and goes all out to remove it by whatever methods he can. So what should we do in sharing the love of God, whose full enjoyment constitutes the happy life? It is God from whom all those who love him derive both their existence and their love; it is God who frees us from any fear that he can fail to satisfy anyone to whom he becomes known; it is God who wants himself to be loved, not in order to gain any reward for himself but to give to those who love him an eternal reward—namely himself, the object of their love. 65. Hence the fact that we also love our enemies. We do not fear them, for they cannot take away from us what we love, but we pity them, for they hate us all the more because they are separated from the one we love. If they turned to him, it is inevitable that they would love him as the goodness which is the source of all happiness and love us as joint participants in such goodness.

66. At this point there arise questions about the angels. They are happy because they enjoy the one whom we too desire to enjoy; and the more we enjoy him in this life, whether 'in a mirror' or 'obscurely',¹⁷⁰ the easier it is for us to endure our absence and the stronger our yearning to end it. But it may be asked, not unreasonably, whether love of the angels is also covered by these two commandments. 67. That the commandment to love our neighbour excludes no human being is made clear by our Lord himself in the gospel and by the apostle Paul. When our Lord was asked by the man to whom he had pronounced these same two commandments and said that the whole law and the prophets depended on them,¹⁷¹ 'And who is my neighbour?',¹⁷² he told the story of a man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho who fell among thieves, was badly beaten up by them, and left injured and half-dead. He taught that the man's only neighbour was the man who showed kindness in reviving and healing him; and he put this in such a way that when questioned the questioner himself admitted it. 68. The Lord said to him, 'Go and do the same'¹⁷³ so it is clear that we should understand by our neighbour the person to whom an act of compassion is due if he needs it or would be due if he

¹⁷⁰ 1 Cor. 13: 12.

¹⁷¹ Matt. 22: 37–40. See n. 53 above.

¹⁷² Luke 10: 29.

¹⁷³ Luke 10: 37.

needed it. It follows from this that a person from whom an act of compassion is due to us in our turn is also our neighbour. For the word 'neighbour' implies a relationship: one can only be a neighbour to a neighbour. 69. Who can fail to see that there is no exception to this, nobody to whom compassion is not due? The commandment extends even to our enemies; in the words of our Lord once again, 'Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.'¹⁷⁷ 70. This is also the teaching of the apostle Paul when he says, 'The commandments "You shall not commit adultery, you shall not kill, you shall not steal, you shall not covet", and any other commandment, are summed up in this text "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." The love of one's neighbour does no wrong.'¹⁷⁸ Anyone who thinks that the apostle was not here giving commandments that embraced all people is compelled to admit something totally absurd and totally wicked: that Paul thought it no sin to violate the wife of a non-Christian or an enemy, or to kill him, or covet his property. If this conclusion is absurd, it is clear that all people must be reckoned as neighbours, because evil must not be done to anyone.

71. So if the person to whom compassion must be shown and the person by whom it must be shown to us are rightly called neighbours, it is obvious that the commandment by which we are instructed to love our neighbour also embraces the holy angels, who perform so many acts of compassion on our behalf, as can easily be observed in many passages of the holy scriptures. It follows that even the Lord God himself wanted to be called our neighbour; for the Lord Jesus Christ made clear that it was he himself who assisted the man who lay half-dead on the road, beaten up and abandoned by the robbers. 72. And in a prayer the prophet says, 'I grieved for him as for a neighbour, or a brother.'¹⁷⁹ But because the divine substance is altogether transcendent and far above our own nature, the commandment to love God was kept distinct from the commandment to love our neighbour. God shows compassion to us because of his own kindness, and we in turn show it to one another because of his kindness: in other words, he pities us so that we may enjoy him, and we in our turn pity one another so that we may enjoy him.

73. There is still an element of uncertainty here. I am saying

¹⁷⁷ Matt. 5: 44.

¹⁷⁸ Rom. 13: 9–10.

¹⁷⁹ Ps. 34: 14 (35: 14).

that we enjoy a thing which we love for itself, and that we should enjoy only a thing by which we are made happy, but use everything else. God loves us (and the divine scripture often commends his love towards us),¹⁸³ but in what way does he love us—so as to use us or to enjoy us? 74. If he enjoys us, he stands in need of our goodness, which only a madman could assert; for all our goodness either comes from him or actually is him. Is it not quite clear and beyond all doubt that light does not stand in need of the brightness of the things which it illuminates? The prophet says very clearly, ‘I said to the Lord, “You are my Lord, since you do not stand in need of my goodness.”’¹⁸⁴ So God does not enjoy us, but uses us. (If he neither enjoys nor uses us, then I fail to see how he can love us at all.)

75. But he does not use us in the way that we use things; for we relate the things which we use to the aim of enjoying God's goodness, whereas God relates his use of us to his own goodness. We exist because he is good, and we are good to the extent that we exist. Moreover, because he is also just, we are not evil with impunity; if we are evil, to that extent we exist less. God exists in the supreme sense, and the original sense, of the word. He is altogether unchangeable, and it is he who could say with full authority ‘I am who I am’, and ‘You will say to them, “I have been sent by the one who is’ ”;¹⁸⁵ so it is true of other things which exist that they could not exist except by him, and that they are good to the extent that they have received their existence from him. 76. So the kind of use attributed to God, that by which he uses us, is related not to his own advantage, but solely to his goodness. If we pity someone or take thought for someone, we do so for that person's advantage, and we concentrate on that; but somehow there also results an advantage to us, since God does not let the compassion we show to the needy go unrewarded. This reward is the supreme reward—that we may thoroughly enjoy him and that all of us who enjoy him may enjoy one another in him.

77. For if we enjoy one another in ourselves, we remain on the road and put our hopes of happiness on a human being or an angel. This is something that arrogant people and arrogant angels pride themselves on; they rejoice when the hopes of others are placed on them. But a holy person or a holy angel restores us when we are weary and when we desire to rest in

¹⁸³ Cf. Rom. 5: 8.

¹⁸⁴ Ps. 15: 2 (16: 2).

¹⁸⁵ Exod. 3: 14.

them and stay with them, using either the resources which they have received for our sakes or those which they have received for their own sakes (but in either case they have certainly received them); and then they impel us, thus restored, to go to the one by the enjoyment of whom we likewise are made happy. 78. The apostle exclaims, 'Was it Paul that was crucified for you? Or were you baptized in Paul's name?'¹⁹⁴ and 'Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the increase.'¹⁹⁵ And the angel warned the man who was adoring him that he should adore God instead, the master under whom he was but the man's fellow servant.¹⁹⁶

79. When you enjoy a human being in God, you are enjoying God rather than that human being. For you enjoy the one by whom you are made happy, and you will one day rejoice that you have attained the one in whom you now set your hope of attaining him. So Paul says to Philemon: 'So, brother, I shall enjoy you in the Lord.'¹⁹⁷ If he had not added the words 'in the Lord', and just said, 'I shall enjoy you', he would have been setting his hopes of happiness on Philemon. Yet the idea of enjoying someone or something is very close to that of using someone or something together with love. 80. For when the object of love is present, it inevitably brings with it pleasure as well. If you go beyond this pleasure and relate it to your permanent goal, you are using it, and are said to enjoy it not in the literal sense but in a transferred sense.¹⁹⁸ But if you hold fast and go no further, making it the goal of your joy, then you should be described as enjoying it in the true and literal sense of the word. This is to be done only in the case of the Trinity, the supreme and unchangeable good.

81. Notice how, although the truth itself and the word by which all things were made became flesh so that it could live among us,¹⁹⁹ the apostle says, 'And if we knew Christ according to the flesh, we do not know him in the same way now.'²⁰⁰ In fact Christ, who chose to offer himself not only as a possession for those who come to their journey's end but also as a road for those who come to the beginning of the ways, chose to become flesh. Whence the saying, 'God created me at the beginning of his ways',²⁰¹ so that those who wanted to come could begin from there. 82. The apostle, then, although still walking on the road and following God as he called him to the prize of a higher

¹⁹⁴ 1 Cor. 1: 13.

¹⁹⁵ 1 Cor. 3: 7.

¹⁹⁶ Rev. 19: 10; 22: 8–9.

¹⁹⁷ Philem. 20. For this way of describing love cf. 3. 37 and *Ep.* 26. 4.

¹⁹⁸ For the trope of *abusio* (catachresis), cf. 3. 89.

¹⁹⁹ John 1: 3, 14.

²⁰⁰ 2 Cor. 5: 16.

²⁰¹ Prov. 8: 22.

calling, none the less ‘forgetting what was behind and straining forward to what lay ahead’²⁰⁶ had already passed beyond the beginning of the ways. In other words, he was not deprived of the one from whom the journey must actually be undertaken and begun by all who long to come to the truth and abide in eternal life. For Christ says, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life’;²⁰⁷ that is, ‘you come by me, you come to me, you abide in me’. 83. For when you come to him, you come also to the Father,²⁰⁸ because God, to whom he is equal, is recognized through his equal, and the spirit binds us and as it were cements us together, so that we can abide in the supreme and unchangeable good. From this it is to be inferred that nothing must detain us on our way, since not even the Lord, at least in his graciously chosen role of being our way, wanted to detain us, but wanted us to pass on, not sticking feebly to temporal things, even though they were accepted and endured by him for our salvation, but rather hastening eagerly through them so that in our journey to the one who has freed our nature from temporal things and set it at the Father’s right hand we may achieve progress and success.

84. The chief purpose of all that we have been saying in our discussion of things is to make it understood that the fulfilment and end of the law²⁰⁹ and all the divine scriptures is to love the thing which must be enjoyed and the thing which together with us can enjoy that thing (since there is no need for a commandment to love oneself). 85. To enlighten us and enable us, the whole temporal dispensation was set up by divine providence for our salvation. We must make use of this, not with a permanent love and enjoyment of it, but with a transient love and enjoyment of our journey, or of our conveyances (so to speak) or any other expedients whatsoever (there may be a more appropriate word), so that we love the means of transport only because of our destination.

86. So anyone who thinks that he has understood the divine scriptures or any part of them, but cannot by his understanding build up this double love of God and neighbour, has not yet succeeded in understanding them. Anyone who derives from them an idea which is useful for supporting this love but fails to say what the writer demonstrably meant in the passage has not made a fatal error, and is certainly not a liar. In a liar there is a

²⁰⁶ Phil. 3: 14, 13.

²⁰⁷ John 14: 6.

²⁰⁸ Cf. John 14: 6–11.

²⁰⁹ Cf. Rom. 13: 10 and 1 Tim. 1: 5.

desire to say what is false, and that is why we find many who want to lie but nobody who wants to be misled.²¹³ 87. Since a person lies knowingly but is misled unknowingly, it is clear enough that in any given situation the person misled is better than the one who lies, since it is better to suffer injustice than to commit it. Everyone who lies commits injustice; so anyone who believes a lie is sometimes useful believes that injustice is sometimes useful. No-one who lies keeps faith while lying—he certainly desires that the person he lies to should put faith in him, but when lying he does not keep faith—and everyone who breaks faith is unjust. So either injustice is sometimes useful—which is impossible—or lying is always useless. 88. Anyone with an interpretation of the scriptures that differs from that of the writer is misled, but not because the scriptures are lying. If, as I began by saying, he is misled by an idea of the kind that builds up love, which is the end of the commandment, he is misled in the same way as a walker who leaves his path by mistake but reaches the destination to which the path leads by going through a field. But he must be put right and shown how it is more useful not to leave the path, in case the habit of deviating should force him to go astray or even adrift.

89. It often happens that by thoughtlessly asserting something that the author did not mean an interpreter runs up against other things which cannot be reconciled with that original idea. If he agrees that these things are true and certain, his original interpretation could not possibly be true, and by cherishing his own idea he comes in some strange way to be more displeased with scripture than with himself. If he encourages this evil to spread it will be his downfall. ‘For we walk by faith, not by sight’,²¹⁴ and faith will falter if the authority of holy scripture is shaken; and if faith falters, love itself decays. 90. For if someone lapses in his faith, he inevitably lapses in his love as well, since he cannot love what he does not believe to be true. If on the other hand he both believes and loves, then by good conduct and by following the rules of good behaviour he gives himself reason to hope that he will attain what he loves. So there are these three things which all knowledge and prophecy serve: faith, hope, and love.²¹⁵ 91. But faith will be replaced by the sight of visible reality, and hope by the real happiness which we shall attain, whereas love will actually increase when these

²¹³ There is a fuller treatment of this and other questions about lying in Augustine's *De Mendaciis*.

²¹⁴ 2 Cor. 5: 7

²¹⁵ 1 Cor. 13: 13.

things pass away. If, through faith, we love what we cannot yet see, how much greater will our love be when we have begun to see! And if, through hope, we love something that we have not yet attained, how much greater will our love be when we have attained it! 92. There is this important difference between temporal things and eternal things: something temporal is loved more before it is possessed, but will lose its appeal when attained, for it does not satisfy the soul, whose true and certain abode is eternity. The eternal, on the other hand, is loved more passionately when obtained than when desired. No-one who desires it is allowed to think more highly of it than is warranted (it would then disappoint when found to be less impressive); but however high one's expectations on the way one will find it even more impressive on arrival.

93. Therefore a person strengthened by faith, hope, and love, and who steadfastly holds on to them, has no need of the scriptures except to instruct others. That is why many people, relying on these three things, actually live in solitude without any texts of the scriptures. They are, I think, a fulfilment of the saying 'If there are prophecies, they will lose their meaning; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge that too will lose its meaning.'²²⁰ 94. By these devices (so to speak) such an edifice of faith, hope, and love has been built in them that they do not seek what is imperfect,²²¹ for they hold what is perfect—perfect, that is, as far as anything can be in this life; for in comparison with the life to come the life of no righteous or holy man in this world is perfect. This is why scripture says, 'there remain faith, hope, and love, these three; the greatest of these is love';²²² when one reaches eternity the other two will pass away and love will remain in an enhanced and a more certain form.

95. So when someone has learnt that the aim of the commandment is 'love from a pure heart, and good conscience and genuine faith',²²³ he will be ready to relate every interpretation of the holy scriptures to these three things and may approach the task of handling these books with confidence. For when the apostle said 'love' he added 'from a pure heart', so that nothing is loved except what should be loved. He added 'good' to 'conscience' because of hope; for a person with the incubus of a bad conscience despairs of reaching what he loves and believes. Thirdly, he said 'with genuine faith': 96. for if our faith is free

²²⁰ 1 Cor. 13: 8.

²²¹ 1 Cor. 13: 10.

²²² 1 Cor. 13: 13.

²²³ 1 Tim. 1: 5.

of untruthfulness then we do not love what should not be loved, whereas by living aright it is impossible for our hope to be in any way misguided.

I have chosen to speak of the things which are objects of our faith only to the extent that I considered necessary for the present context; much has already been said by me and by others in other works. This is the end of this book. The remainder of my discussion, in as much detail as the Lord allows, will be about signs.

Book Two

1. When I was writing about things I began with the warning that attention should be paid solely to the fact that they existed, and not to anything besides themselves that they might signify.²²⁶ Now that I am discussing signs, I must say, conversely, that attention should not be paid to the fact that they exist, but rather to the fact that they are signs, or, in other words, that they signify.²²⁷ For a sign is a thing which of itself makes some other thing come to mind, besides the impression that it presents to the senses. So when we see a footprint we think that the animal whose footprint it is has passed by; when we see smoke we realize that there is fire beneath it; when we hear the voice of an animate being we note its feeling; and when the trumpet sounds soldiers know they must advance or retreat or do whatever else the state of the battle demands.

2. Some signs are natural, others given. Natural signs are those which without a wish or any urge to signify cause something else besides themselves to be known from them, like smoke, which signifies fire. It does not signify fire because it wishes to do so; but because of our observation and attention to things that we have experienced it is realized that there is fire beneath it, even if nothing but smoke appears. The footprint of a passing animal also belongs to this category. The expression of an angry or depressed person signifies an emotional state even if there is no such wish on the part of the person who is angry or depressed, and likewise any other emotion is revealed by the evidence of the face even if we are not seeking to reveal it. It is not my intention to discuss this whole category now, but since it comes into my classification it could not be omitted altogether. So let the above remarks suffice.

3. Given signs are those which living things give to each other, in order to show, to the best of their ability, the emotions of their minds, or anything that they have felt or learnt. There is

²²⁶ 1.4.

²²⁷ There are illuminating analyses of Augustine's theory of signs in R. A. Markus, 'St. Augustine on Signs', *Phronesis*, 2 (1957), 60–83, B. D. Jackson, 'The Theory of Signs in St Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*', *Revue des Études Augustiniennes*, 15 (1969) 9–49 and C. Kirwan, *Augustine* (London, 1989), 35–43.

no reason for us to signify something (that is, to give a sign) except to express and transmit to another's mind what is in the mind of the person who gives the sign. It is this category of signs—to the extent that it applies to humans—that I have decided to examine and discuss, because even the divinely given signs contained in the holy scriptures have been communicated to us by the human beings who wrote them. 4. Some animals, too, have signs among themselves by which they show the desires of their minds: a cockerel on finding food gives a vocal sign to its hen to come quickly, and a dove calls to, or is called by, its mate by cooing. Many other such signs are observed regularly. Whether (as with a facial expression or a shout of pain) they accompany emotion without any desire to signify, or whether they are really given in order to signify something, is another question, and irrelevant to the matter in hand. I am excluding it from this work as not essential.

5. Some of the signs by which people communicate their feelings to one another concern the eyes; most of them concern the ears, and a very small number concern the other senses. When we nod, we give a sign just to the eyes of the person whom we want, by means of that sign, to make aware of our wishes. Certain movements of the hands signify a great deal. Actors, by the movement of all their limbs, give certain signs to the *cognoscenti* and, as it were, converse with the spectators' eyes; and it is through the eyes that flags and standards convey the wishes of military commanders. All these things are, to coin a phrase, visible words. 6. But most signs, as I said, and especially verbal ones, concern the ears. A trumpet, a flute, and a lyre generally produce not just a pleasant sound but one that is also significant. But these signs are very few compared with words. Words have gained an altogether dominant role among humans in signifying the ideas conceived by the mind that a person wants to reveal. 7. It is true that our Lord gave a sign through the smell of the ointment by which his feet were anointed,²³¹ and that in the sacrament of his body and blood he signified his wishes through the sense of taste,²³² and that the healing of the woman who touched the border of his garment²³³ has its significance. But an incalculable number of the signs by which people disclose their thoughts consist in words. I have

²³¹ John 12: 3–7.

²³² Matt. 26: 26–8; Mark 14: 22–4; Luke 22: 15–20.

²³³ Matt. 9: 20–2; Mark 5: 25–9; Luke 8: 43–4.

been able to express in words all the various kinds of sign that I have briefly mentioned, but in no way could I have expressed all my words in terms of signs.

8. But spoken words cease to exist as soon as they come into contact with the air, and their existence is no more lasting than that of their sound; hence the invention, in the form of letters, of signs of words. In this way words are presented to the eyes, not in themselves, but by certain signs peculiar to them. These signs could not be shared by all nations, because of the sin of human disunity by which each one sought hegemony for itself. This pride is signified by the famous tower raised towards heaven at the time when wicked men justly received incompatible languages to match their incompatible minds.²³⁸ 9. Consequently even divine scripture, by which assistance is provided for the many serious disorders of the human will, after starting off in one language,²³⁹ in which it could have conveniently been spread throughout the world, was circulated far and wide in the various languages of translators and became known in this way to the Gentiles for their salvation. The aim of its readers is simply to find out the thoughts and wishes of those by whom it was written down and, through them, the will of God, which we believe these men followed as they spoke.

10. But casual readers are misled by problems and ambiguities of many kinds, mistaking one thing for another. In some passages they find no meaning at all that they can grasp at, even falsely, so thick is the fog created by some obscure phrases. I have no doubt that this is all divinely predetermined, so that pride may be subdued by hard work and intellects which tend to despise things that are easily discovered may be rescued from boredom and reinvigorated.²⁴⁰ 11. Why is it, I wonder, that if someone should say that there exist holy and perfect men by whose lives and conduct the church of Christ tears away those who come to it from their various superstitions, and by inspiring them to imitate their goodness somehow incorporates them into itself; and that there exist servants of the true God, good and faithful men who, putting aside the burdens of this life, have come to the holy font of baptism, arise from it born again with the Holy Spirit, and then produce the fruit of a double love, that is love of God and love of their neighbour²⁴¹—why is it that someone who says this gives less pleasure

²³⁸ Gen. 11: 1–9.

²³⁹ Hebrew for the Old Testament, Greek for the New.

²⁴⁰ Cf. 4. 27, *Ep.* 55. 11. 21, and *Ep.* 137. 18, and for Augustine's justifications of allegory, see J. Pépin, 'Saint Augustin et la fonction protreptique de l'allégorie', *Recherches Augustiniennes*, 1 (1958), 244–57.

²⁴¹ S. of S. 4. 2. The same interpretation of the two lambs is found in *Ep.* 149. 1. 4 and *Serm.* 313B. 3.

to an audience than by expounding in the same terms this passage from the Song of Songs, where the church is addressed and praised like a beautiful woman: ‘Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes ascending from the pool, all of which give birth to twins, and there is not a sterile animal among them’? 12. Surely one learns the same lesson as when one hears it in plain words without the support of the imagery? And yet somehow it gives me more pleasure to contemplate holy men, when I see them as the teeth of the church tearing men away from their errors and transferring them into its body, breaking down their rawness by biting and chewing. And it is with the greatest of pleasure that I visualize the shorn ewes, their worldly burdens set aside like fleeces, ascending from the pool (baptism) and all giving birth to twins (the two commandments of love), with none of them failing to produce this holy fruit. 13. Exactly why this picture gives me greater pleasure than if no such imagery were presented by the divine books, since the topic is the same, and the lesson the same, it is difficult to say; this, however, is another question entirely. But no-one disputes that it is much more pleasant to learn lessons presented through imagery, and much more rewarding to discover meanings that are won only with difficulty. 14. Those who fail to discover what they are looking for suffer from hunger, whereas those who do not look, because they have it in front of them, often die of boredom. In both situations the danger is lethargy. 15. It is a wonderful and beneficial thing that the Holy Spirit organized the holy scripture so as to satisfy hunger by means of its plainer passages and remove boredom by means of its obscurer ones. Virtually nothing is unearthed from these obscurities which cannot be found quite plainly expressed somewhere else.

16. It is therefore necessary above all else to be moved by the fear of God towards learning his will: what it is that he instructs us to seek or avoid.²⁴³ This fear will necessarily inspire reflection about our mortality and future death, and by nailing our flesh to the wood of the cross as it were crucify all our presumptuous impulses. 17. After that it is necessary, through holiness, to become docile, and not contradict holy scripture—whether we understand it (as when it hits at some of our vices) or fail to understand it (as when we feel that we could by ourselves gain better knowledge or give better instruction)—but rather

²⁴³ This description of the seven steps or stages to wisdom is closely based on the description of the gifts of the spirit found (in the reverse order) in Isa. 11: 2–3.

ponder and believe that what is written there, even if obscure, is better and truer than any insights that we may gain by our own efforts.

18. After these two stages of fear and holiness comes the third stage, that of knowledge, with which I now propose to deal. This is the area in which every student of the divine scriptures exerts himself, and what he will find in them is quite simply that he must love God for himself, and his neighbour for God's sake, and that he must love God with his whole heart, his whole soul, and his whole mind, and his neighbour as himself²⁴⁷—in other words, that his love of his neighbour, like his own self-love, should be totally related to God. 19. (I have dealt with these two commandments in the previous book, in my discussion of things.) It is vital that the reader first learns from the scriptures that he is entangled in a love of this present age, of temporal things, that is, and is far from loving God and his neighbour to the extent that scripture prescribes. It is at this point that the fear which makes him ponder the judgement of God, and the holiness which makes it impossible for him not to admit and submit to the authority of the holy books, compel him to deplore his own condition. 20. For this knowledge makes a person with good reason to hope not boastful but remorseful; in this state he obtains by constant prayer the encouragement of divine assistance, so that he is not crushed by despair. And so he begins to be at the fourth stage—that of fortitude—which brings a hunger and thirst after righteousness.²⁴⁸ In this state he extricates himself from all the fatal charms of transient things; turning away from these, he turns to the love of eternal things, namely the unchangeable unity which is also the Trinity.

21. When he beholds this light (as far as he is able to), shining as it does even into remote places, and realizes that because of the weakness of his vision he cannot bear its brilliance, he is at the fifth stage—that is, in the resolve of compassion²⁴⁹—and purifies his mind, which is somehow turbulent and feuding with itself because of the impurities accumulated by its desire of what is inferior. Here he strenuously occupies himself with the love of his neighbour and becomes perfect in it. 22. Full of hope now, and at full strength, since he has come to love even his enemy, he rises to the sixth stage, in

²⁴⁷ Matt. 22: 37–9.

²⁴⁸ Matt. 5: 6.

²⁴⁹ Latin versions of Isaiah give *consilium* ('resolve'), with no mention of compassion; hence Augustine's strained expression. On purification, see 1. 22 n.

which he now purifies the eye by which God may actually be seen—to the extent that he may be seen by those who, to the best of their ability, die to this world; for they see to the extent that they die to the world, and to the extent that they live in it they fail to see. The vision of that light, although it now begins to appear more steady and not only more tolerable but also more pleasant, is none the less said to be seen still obscurely and through a mirror;²⁵⁴ this is because we walk more by faith than by sight²⁵⁵ as we travel in this life, even though we are citizens of heaven.²⁵⁶ 23. At this stage he purifies the eye of his heart so that he does not give a higher priority than the truth, or indeed an equal one, even to his neighbour; nor does he give such precedence to himself, since he does not give it to the one whom he loves as himself. So this holy person will have a heart so single-minded and purified that he will not be deflected from the truth either by an eagerness to please men or by the thought of avoiding any of the troubles which beset him in this life. Such a son ascends to wisdom, which is the seventh and last stage, enjoyed by those who are calm and peaceful. ‘The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom’:²⁵⁷ these are the stages by which we progress from the one to the other.

24. But let us take our thoughts back to the third stage. Here I propose to discuss and consider whatever ideas the Lord may provide. The most expert investigator of the divine scriptures will be the person who, firstly, has read them all and has a good knowledge—a reading knowledge, at least, if not yet a complete understanding—of those pronounced canonical. He will read the others more confidently when equipped with a belief in the truth; they will then be unable to take possession of his unprotected mind and prejudice him in any way against sound interpretations or delude him by their dangerous false-hoods and fantasies. In the matter of canonical scriptures he should follow the authority of as many catholic churches as possible, including of course those that were found worthy to have apostolic seats and receive apostolic letters. 25. He will apply this principle to the canonical scriptures: to prefer those accepted by all catholic churches to those which some do not accept. As for those not universally accepted, he should prefer those accepted by a majority of churches, and by the more authoritative ones, to those supported by fewer churches, or by

²⁵⁴ 1 Cor. 13: 12.

²⁵⁵ 2 Cor. 5: 6–7.

²⁵⁶ Cf. Phil. 3: 20.

²⁵⁷ Ps. 110: 10 (111: 10).

churches of lesser authority. Should he find that some scriptures are accepted by the majority of churches, but others by the more authoritative ones (though in fact he could not possibly find this situation) I think that they should be considered to have equal authority.

26. The complete canon of scripture,²⁶² on which I say that our attention should be concentrated, includes the following books: the five books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy), and the single books of Joshua son of Nave and of Judges, and the little book known as Ruth, which seems to relate more to the beginning of Kings, and then the four books of Kings and the two of Chronicles, which do not follow chronologically but proceed as it were side by side with Kings. 27. All this is historiography, which covers continuous periods and gives a chronological sequence of events. There are others, forming another sequence, not connected with either this class or each other, like Job, Tobias, Esther, Judith, and the two books of Maccabees and the two of Ezra,²⁶³ which rather seem to follow on from the chronologically ordered account which ends with Kings and Chronicles. Then come the prophets, including David's single book of Psalms, and three books of Solomon, namely Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes. The two books entitled Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus are also said to be by Solomon, on the strength of a general similarity; but there is a strong tradition that Jesus Sirach wrote them,²⁶⁴ and, in any case, because they have been found worthy of inclusion among authoritative texts, they should be numbered with the prophetic books. 28. There remain the books of the prophets properly so called, the individual books of the twelve prophets who because they are joined together and never separated are counted as one. Their names are these: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zachariah, and Malachi. Then there are the four prophets in larger books: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel. 29. These forty-four books form the authoritative Old Testament;²⁶⁵ the authoritative New Testament consists of the Gospel in four books (Matthew, Mark,

²⁶² The details of this canon, and its relationship to other contemporary African versions, is discussed by A.-M. La Bonnardière, 'Le canon des divines écritures' in *Saint Augustin et la Bible*, iii (Bible de Tous les Temps; Paris, 1986), 287–301.

²⁶³ Ezra and Nehemiah.

²⁶⁴ Augustine withdraws this in *Retract.* 2. 30. 2, after he had realized that in all probability Jesus Sirach was not the author. See also La Bonnardière (ed.), *Saint Augustin et la Bible*, 294–8.

²⁶⁵ Augustine comments in *Retract.* 2. 30. 3 that in using the expression 'Old Testament' here he had followed the usage of the church and not that of Paul.

Luke, John), fourteen letters of the apostle Paul (Romans, Corinthians (two), Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Thessalonians (two), Colossians,²⁶⁹ Timothy (two), Titus, Philemon, Hebrews), two of Peter, three of John, one of Jude, and one of James; the single book of the Acts of the Apostles and the single book of the Revelation of John.

30. These are all the books in which those who fear God and are made docile by their holiness seek God's will. The first rule in this laborious task is, as I have said, to know these books; not necessarily to understand them but to read them so as to commit them to memory or at least make them not totally unfamiliar. Then the matters which are clearly stated in them, whether ethical precepts or articles of belief, should be examined carefully and intelligently. The greater a person's intellectual capacity, the more of these he finds. 31. In clearly expressed passages of scripture one can find all the things that concern faith and the moral life (namely hope and love, treated in my previous book).²⁷⁰ Then, after gaining a familiarity with the language of the divine scriptures, one should proceed to explore and analyse the obscure passages, by taking examples from the more obvious parts to illuminate obscure expressions and by using the evidence of indisputable passages to remove the uncertainty of ambiguous ones. Here memory is extremely valuable; and it cannot be supplied by these instructions if it is lacking.

32. There are two reasons why written texts fail to be understood: their meaning may be veiled either by unknown signs or by ambiguous signs. Signs are either literal or metaphorical. They are called literal when used to signify the things for which they were invented: so, for example, when we say *bovem*, meaning the animal which we and all speakers of Latin call by that name. 33. They are metaphorical when the actual things which we signify by the particular words are used to signify something else: when, for example, we say *bovem* and not only interpret these two syllables to mean the animal normally referred to by that name but also understand, by that animal, 'worker in the gospel', which is what scripture, as interpreted by the apostle Paul, means when it says, 'You shall not muzzle the ox that treads out the grain'.²⁷¹

²⁶⁹ The placing of Colossians after Thessalonians was common in the Western Church.

²⁷⁰ See especially 1. 90–6.

²⁷¹ 1 Cor. 9: 9, and 1 Tim. 5: 18, quoting Deut. 25: 4.

34. An important antidote to the ignorance of literal signs is the knowledge of languages. Users of the Latin language—and it is these that I have now undertaken to instruct—need two others, Hebrew and Greek, for an understanding of the divine scriptures, so that recourse may be had to the original versions if any uncertainty arises from the infinite variety of Latin translators. Though we often find Hebrew words untranslated in the texts, like *amen*, *alleluia*, *racha*,²⁷⁵ *osanna*.²⁷⁶ In some cases, although they could be translated, the original form is preserved for the sake of its solemn authority (so *amen*, *alleluia*); in others, like the other two that I mentioned, they are said to be incapable of being translated into another language. 35. There are certain words in particular languages which just cannot be translated into the idioms of another language. This is especially true of interjections, which signify emotion, rather than an element of clearly conceived meaning: two such words, it is said, are *racha*, a word expressing anger, and *osanna*, a word expressing joy. 36. But it is not because of these few words, which it is easy enough to note down and ask other people about, but because of the aforementioned diversity of translators that a knowledge of languages is necessary. Translators of scripture from Hebrew into Greek can be easily counted, but not so translators into Latin, for in the early days of the faith any person who got hold of a Greek manuscript and fancied that he had some ability in the two languages went ahead and translated it.³⁷ This fact actually proves more of a help to interpretation than a hindrance, provided that readers are not too casual. Obscure passages are often clarified by the inspection of several manuscripts, like the passage in Isaiah²⁷⁷ rendered by one translator as ‘and do not despise the household of your own seed’, but by another as ‘and do not despise your own flesh’. Each one confirms the other. 38. One is explained by the other, because ‘flesh’ can be taken literally—so that one may consider this a warning not to despise one's own body—and ‘household of your seed’ can be metaphorically understood as ‘Christians’, those spiritually born with us from the same seed of the word. But when the ideas of the translators are compared a more plausible idea suggests itself: that the command is literally about not despising your kinsfolk, since when you relate ‘the

²⁷⁵ Matt. 5: 22.

²⁷⁶ Matt. 21: 9, 15; Mark 11: 9–10; John 12: 13.

²⁷⁷ Isa. 58: 7. The first reading is that of the Septuagint, the second a more literal translation used in the Vulgate. In Augustine's text *cum* has been added with Schaublin.

household of your own seed' to the flesh your kinsfolk are what particularly comes to mind. This, I think, is the explanation of Paul's statement, 'If in any way I can arouse my flesh to jealousy, so that I may save some of them'²⁸⁴ (in other words, so that they too may believe by jealously emulating those who had earlier believed). 39. By his flesh he meant the Jews, by virtue of his kinship with them. Another example, again from Isaiah:²⁸⁵ one version has 'if you do not believe, you will not understand', another has 'if you do not believe, you will not stand fast'. It is not clear which of these represents the truth unless the versions in the original language are consulted. Yet both convey something important to those who read intelligently. It is difficult to find translators who diverge so much that they do not touch at some point. 40. So because understanding concerns the vision of eternal things, whereas faith nourishes us with milk, so to speak, while we are babies in the cradle of this temporal life, and because here and now 'we walk by faith, not sight',²⁸⁶ and because if we do not walk by faith we cannot reach that vision which is not transient but eternal, and because we hold fast to the truth through a purified understanding—that is why one version says 'if you do not believe you will not stand fast' and the other 'if you do not believe you will not understand'.⁴¹ Ambiguity in the original language often misleads a translator unfamiliar with the general sense of a passage, who may import a meaning which is quite unrelated to the writer's meaning. For example, some manuscripts have:²⁸⁷ 'their feet are sharp to shed blood' (*οξὺ* in Greek means both 'sharp' and 'quick'). The translator who wrote 'their feet are quick to shed blood' saw the meaning; but another was misled by the ambiguous sign and went astray. 42. Any other translations of this are not obscure, but plain wrong. They differ from the preceding cases, and our advice must be not to seek an interpretation of such texts, but an emendation. Another example: because *moschus* is 'calf' in Greek some translators did not interpret the word *moscheumata* as 'plants' but translated it as 'calves'.²⁸⁸ This mistake has taken over so many manuscripts that an alternative reading is hard to find;²⁸⁹ and yet the meaning is quite obvious, because all is revealed in the words that follow. 'False plants do not put out deep roots' gives better

²⁸⁴ Rom. 11: 14.

²⁸⁵ Isa. 7: 9. The readings are those of the Septuagint and Symmachus respectively. Augustine has the second in *De Trin.* 7.6 and 15.2.

²⁸⁶ 2 Cor. 5: 7.

²⁸⁷ Ps. 13: 3, quoted in Rom. 3: 15; cf. Isa. 59: 7.

²⁸⁸ Wisd. 4: 3.

²⁸⁹ In fact no extant witness agrees with Augustine.

meaning here than ‘calves’, which are not rooted to the earth, but walk over it with their feet! This particular translation is guaranteed by the surrounding context.⁴³ Because the exact meaning which the various translators are trying to express, each according to his own ability and judgement, is not clear without an examination of the language being translated, and because a translator, unless very expert, often strays away from the author's meaning, we should aim either to acquire a knowledge of the languages from which the Latin scripture derives or to use the versions of those who keep excessively close to the literal meaning. Not that such translations are adequate, but they may be used to control the freedom or error of others who in their translations have chosen to follow the ideas rather than the words.

44. Translators often meet not only individual words, but also whole phrases which simply cannot be expressed in the idioms of the Latin language, at least not if one wants to maintain the usage of ancient speakers of Latin. Sometimes these translations lose nothing in intelligibility but trouble those people who take more delight in things when correct usage is observed in expressing the corresponding signs. What is called a solecism²⁹³ is simply what results when words are not combined according to the rules by which our predecessors, who spoke with some authority, combined them. Whether you say *inter bomines* or *inter hominibus*²⁹⁴ does not matter to a student intent upon things.

45. Likewise, what is a barbarism but a word articulated with letters or sounds that are not the same as those with which it was normally articulated by those who spoke Latin before us? Whether one says *ignoscere*²⁹⁵ with a long or short third syllable is of little concern to someone beseeching God to forgive his sins, however he may have managed to utter the word. What, then, is correctness of speech but the maintenance of the practice of others, as established by the authority of ancient speakers?⁴⁶ But the weaker men are, the more they are troubled by such matters. Their weakness stems from a desire to appear learned, not with a knowledge of things, by which we are edified, but with a knowledge of signs, by which it is difficult not to be puffed up in some way; even a knowledge of things often makes people boastful, unless their necks are held down

²⁹³ For classical definitions of ‘solecism’ and ‘barbarism’ see *Rhet. Her.* 4. 12. 17, and *Quint.* 1. 5.

²⁹⁴ The meaning is the same (‘among men’); only the first is good Latin. The same example of grammatical error is given by some manuscripts in *Conf.* 1. 18. 29.

²⁹⁵ ‘To forgive’: Augustine means ‘vowel’, not ‘syllable’.

by the Lord's yoke. Surely there is no obstacle to the understanding in this version: 'what is the land in which they dwell upon it, whether it is good or wicked; and what are the towns in which they themselves live in them?'³⁰¹ 47. I judge this to be the idiom of a foreign language rather than a particularly profound idea. And the version which we are now unable to remove from the mouths of our singing congregations—'over him my sanctification will flourish'³⁰²—certainly loses none of the meaning. A more educated listener would prefer it to be corrected (by saying *florebit*, not *floriet*), and the only obstacle to this correction is the habit of those who sing it. So such matters can readily be ignored if one has no desire to avoid expressions which do not in any way detract from a sound understanding. 48. But now take the apostolic saying, 'The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God stronger than men'.³⁰³ Suppose that someone wished to keep the Greek expression,³⁰⁴ with *hominum* in place of *hominibus*: the mind of the alert reader would still get to the truth of the statement, but the less quick-witted reader would either fail to understand it or understand it wrongly. Such an expression is not just faulty Latin; it is potentially ambiguous, if it gives the impression that man's foolishness is wiser, and man's weakness stronger, than God's. But the alternative *sapientius est hominibus*, though free of solecism, is not free of ambiguity: 49. it is not clear, except in the light of the context, whether it is the plural of *huic homini* or *hoc homine*.³⁰⁵ A better version would be *sapientius est quam homines* or *fortius est quam homines*. 50. I shall speak later about ambiguous signs; now I am dealing with unfamiliar ones, of which there are two kinds, as far as words are concerned. A reader may be perplexed by either an unfamiliar word or an unfamiliar expression. If they come from other languages the information must be sought from speakers of those languages, or else the languages must be learnt (if time and ability allow), or else a collection of several translations must be consulted. If we are unfamiliar with some words and expressions in our own language, they become known to us by the process of reading and listening. 51. Nothing should be committed to memory more urgently than unfamiliar kinds of words and expressions; so that when we meet a knowledgeable person whom we can ask, or a similar expression which makes

³⁰¹ Num. 13: 19, in the Septuagint version, which follows Hebrew idiom closely.

³⁰² Ps. 131: 18 (132: 18).

³⁰³ 1 Cor. 1: 25.

³⁰⁴ Using the genitive case to express comparison, which it does not do in classical Latin.

³⁰⁵ The former is in the dative case, the latter in the ablative.

clear from the passages which precede and follow it, or both, what is the force or significance of the unfamiliar word, we can easily make a note of it, or find out about it, with the help of our memory. (Yet such is the force of habit, even in learning, that those who are nourished and educated in the holy scriptures are more surprised by expressions from elsewhere, and regard them as worse Latin than the ones which they have learnt in scripture but are not found in Latin literature.) 52. In this area too it is very helpful to collect manuscripts and examine and discuss a number of translations. But inaccuracy must be excluded, for the attention of those who wish to know the divine scripture must first focus on the task of correcting the manuscripts, so that uncorrected ones give place to corrected ones, assuming that they belong to the same class of translation.⁵³ Among actual translations the Itala should be preferred to all others,³⁰⁸ as it keeps more closely to the words without sacrificing clarity of expression. To correct any Latin manuscripts Greek ones should be used: among these, as far as the Old Testament is concerned, the authority of the Septuagint is supreme. Its seventy writers are now claimed in all the more informed churches to have performed their task of translation with such strong guidance from the Holy Spirit that this great number of men spoke with but a single voice.³⁰⁹ 54. If, as is generally held, and indeed asserted by many who are not unworthy of belief, each one of these wrote his translation alone in an individual cell and nothing was found in anyone's version which was not found, in the same words and the same order of words, in the others, who would dare to adapt such an authoritative work, let alone adopt anything in preference to it? But if in fact they joined forces so as to achieve unanimity by open discussion and joint decision, even so it would not be right or proper for any one person, however expert, to think of correcting a version agreed by so many experienced scholars. 55. Therefore, even if we find in the Hebrew versions something that differs from what they wrote, I believe that we should defer to the divine dispensation which was made through them so that the books which the Jewish race refused to reveal to other peoples (whether out of religious scruple or

³⁰⁸ An Italian version of the pre-Vulgate text; further identification with extant witnesses has proved impossible. See J. Schildenberger, 'Die Itala des heiligen Augustinus', in *Colligere Fragmenta, Festschrift Alban Dold* (Beuron, 1952), 84–102, who refuted attempts to see a reference to the Vulgate or emend the text. See also S. Atkinson, 'A Commentary on S. Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*, II. 1–40', unpub. B.Phil. thesis (St. Andrews, 1979), 119–23.

³⁰⁹ On this and other details see S. Jellicoe, *The Septuagint and Modern Study* (Oxford, 1968), 29–58.

envy) might be revealed, through the mediating power of King Ptolemy,³¹⁴ well in advance to the peoples that were destined to believe through our Lord. It may indeed be the case that they translated in a way that the Holy Spirit, who was leading them and creating unanimity, judged appropriate to the Gentiles. 56. But, as I said above,³¹⁵ the comparison of translations which have kept more closely to the words is often not without its value in explaining a passage. So, as I said to begin with, Latin manuscripts of the Old Testament should be corrected if necessary by authoritative Greek ones, and especially by the version of the scholars who though seventy in number are said to have been unanimous. The Latin manuscripts of the New Testament, if there is any uncertainty in the various Latin versions, should without doubt give place to Greek ones, especially those found in the more learned and diligent churches.⁵⁷ As for metaphorical signs, any unfamiliar ones which make the reader puzzled must be examined partly through a knowledge of languages, and partly through a knowledge of things. There is a figurative significance and certainly some hidden meaning conveyed by the episode of the pool of Siloam,³¹⁶ where the man who had his eyes anointed by the Lord with mud made from spittle was ordered to wash his face. If the evangelist had not explained this name from an unfamiliar language, this important meaning would have remained hidden. 58. So too many of the Hebrew names not explained by the authors of these books undoubtedly have considerable significance and much help to give in solving the mysteries of the scriptures, if they can be explained at all. Various experts in this language have rendered no small service to posterity by explaining all these individual words from the scriptures³¹⁷ and giving the meaning of the names Adam, Eve, Abraham, and Moses, and of place-names such as Jerusalem, Zion, Jericho, Sinai, Lebanon, Jordan, and any other names in that language that are unfamiliar to us. Once these are clarified and explained many figurative expressions in scripture become quite clear.⁵⁹ Ignorance of things makes figurative expressions unclear when we are ignorant of the qualities of animals or stones or plants or other things mentioned in scripture for the sake of

³¹⁴ Ptolemy Philadelphus (285–246 BC), as stated in Augustine's longer account in *Civ. Dei* 18. 42.

³¹⁵ 2. 43.

³¹⁶ John 9: 7.

³¹⁷ Notably Jerome, in his *Liber Interpretationis Hebraicorum Nominum* and *Liber Locorum*, a gazetteer based on a work of Eusebius. See J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome* (London, 1975), 153–5.

some analogy. The well-known fact about the snake, that it offers its whole body to assailants in place of its head, marvellously illustrates the meaning of the Lord's injunction to be as wise as serpents,³²⁸ which means that in place of our head, which is Christ,³²⁹ we should offer our body to persecutors, so that the Christian faith is not as it were killed within us when we spare our body and deny God.³³⁰ 60. And the fact that a snake confined in its narrow lair puts off its old garment and is said to take on new strength³³¹ chimes in excellently with the idea of imitating the serpent's astuteness and putting off the old man (to use the words of the apostle)³³² in order to put on the new, and also with that of doing so in a confined place, for the Lord said 'enter by the narrow gate'.³³³ Just as a knowledge of the habits of the snake clarifies the many analogies involving this animal regularly given in scripture, so too an ignorance of the numerous animals mentioned no less frequently in an analogy is a great hindrance to understanding. The same is true of stones, herbs, and anything that has roots. 61. Even a knowledge of the carbuncle, a stone which shines in the dark, explains many obscure passages in scripture where it is used in an analogy; and ignorance of the beryl and adamant often closes the door to understanding. It is easy to understand that perpetual peace is signified by the olive branch brought by the dove when it returned to the ark,³³⁴ simply because we know that the smooth surface of oil is not easily broken by another liquid and also that the tree itself is in leaf all year round. And because of their ignorance about hyssop³³⁵ many people, unaware of its power to cleanse the lungs or even (so it is said) to split rocks with its roots, in spite of its low and humble habit, are quite unable to discover why it is said, 'You will purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean'.³³⁶ 62. An unfamiliarity with numbers makes unintelligible many things that are said figuratively and mystically in scripture. An intelligent intellect (if I may put it thus) cannot fail to be intrigued by the meaning of the fact that Moses and Elijah and the Lord himself fasted for forty days.³³⁷ The knotty problem of the figurative significance of this event cannot be solved except by understanding and considering the number, which comprises four times ten, and signifies the knowledge of

³²⁸ Matt. 10: 16.

³²⁹ Eph. 4: 15.

³³⁰ This interpretation is the usual one in the contemporary Latin Fathers.

³³¹ For example, by Servius on Verg. *Aen.* 2. 473.

³³² Eph. 4: 22–4.

³³³ Matt. 7: 13.

³³⁴ Gen. 8: 11.

³³⁵ Cf. 2. 150.

³³⁶ Ps. 50: 9 (51: 7).

³³⁷ Exod. 24: 18, 3 Kgs. (1 Kgs.) 19: 8, Matt. 4: 2.

all things woven into the temporal order. 63. The courses of the day and the year are based on the number four: the day is divided into the hours of morning, afternoon, evening, and night, the year into the months of spring, summer, autumn, and winter. While we live in the temporal order, we must fast and abstain from the enjoyment of what is temporal, for the sake of the eternity in which we desire to live, but it is actually the passage of time by which the lesson of despising the temporal and seeking the eternal is brought home to us. 64. Then the number ten signifies the knowledge of the creator and creation: the Trinity is the number of the creator, while the number seven symbolizes the creation because it represents life and the body. The former has three elements (hence the precept that God must be loved with the whole heart, the whole soul, and the whole mind),³⁴⁴ and as for the body, the four elements of which it consists are perfectly obvious.³⁴⁵ To live soberly according to this significance of the number ten—conveyed to us temporally (hence the multiplication by four)—and abstain from the pleasures of this world, this is the significance of the forty-day fast. 65. This is enjoined by the law, as represented by Moses, by prophecy, as represented by Elijah, and by the Lord himself, who, to symbolize that he enjoyed the testimony of the law and the prophets, shone out in the midst of them on the mountain as the three amazed disciples looked on.³⁴⁶ In the same way a solution may be found to explain how the number fifty, which enjoys particular authority in our religion because of Pentecost,³⁴⁷ comes from the number forty, and how, when it is multiplied by three—either because of the three eras (before the law, under the law, under grace) or because of the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—and with the conspicuous addition of the Trinity, refers to the mystery of the fully purified church, matching the 153 fishes that were caught in the nets cast on the right-hand side of the boat after the Lord's resurrection.³⁴⁸ In this way, expressed in a variety of numbers, there are in the sacred books certain abstruse analogies which are inaccessible to readers without a knowledge of number. 66. Many passages are also made inaccessible and opaque by an ignorance of music. It has been elegantly demonstrated³⁴⁹

³⁴⁴ Matt. 22: 37.

³⁴⁵ Air, fire, earth, and water.

³⁴⁶ Matt. 17: 1–8; Mark 9: 2–6.

³⁴⁷ Pentecost means literally 'fiftieth' (day).

³⁴⁸ John 21: 6–11.

³⁴⁹ The author of this insight, often exploited in Augustine's *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, is not known.

that there are some figurative illustrations of things based on the difference between the psaltery and the lyre. It is a matter of dispute among experts, not unreasonably, whether the psaltery of ten strings embodies some musical principle which obliges it to have this number of strings, or whether, if this is not so, the number should for that reason be understood rather in a special religious sense, either in terms of the decalogue (and if that number is investigated, it can only be related to the creator and the creation), or in terms of the number ten itself as expounded above. 67. The number of years given in the gospel for the building of the temple³⁵⁶ (forty-six) has some musical overtones, and when related to the constitution of the Lord's body—which is why the temple was mentioned—compels numerous heretics to admit that the Son of God took on a real human body, not an insubstantial one.³⁵⁷ Indeed we find both number and music mentioned with respect in several places in the holy scriptures. 68. But we must not listen to the fictions of pagan superstition, which have represented the nine Muses as the daughters of Jupiter and Memory. They were refuted by Varro, a man whose erudition and thirst for knowledge could not, I think, be surpassed among pagans.³⁵⁸ He says that a certain town (I forget its name)³⁵⁹ placed contracts with three workmen for three sets of images of the Muses to be set up as an offering in Apollo's temple, intending to select and buy those of the sculptor who produced the most attractive ones. 69. It so happened that the workmen's products were equally attractive, and the town selected all nine and they were all bought for dedication in Apollo's temple. He adds that the poet Hesiod later gave them names.³⁶⁰ So Jupiter did not beget the nine Muses, but they were made by three sculptors, three apiece. 70. And the town had placed contracts for three not because they had seen them in a dream or because that number had appeared before the eyes of one of its citizens, but because it was a simple matter to observe that all sound, which is the essence of music, is naturally threefold.³⁶¹ A sound is either produced by the voice, as by those who make music with their mouths, without a musical instrument, or by breath, as with trumpets and flutes, or by percussion, as in the case of lyres, drums, or anything else which resonates when struck. 71. But whether Varro's story is true or not, we should not

³⁵⁶ John 2: 20.

³⁵⁷ Cf. *Tract. Iob.* 10. 10–12, *De Div. Quaest.* 56, *De Trin.* 4. 5.

³⁵⁸ Varro is praised no less highly in *Cin. Dei* 6. 2. Augustine's use of him is discussed in H. Hagendahl, *Augustine and the Latin Classics* (Studia Graeca et Latina Gothoburgensia xx 1 and 2; Gothenburg, 1967), 2. 627–30. The present point was probably made in one (or both) of his lost works *Antiquitates* and *De Musica*.

³⁵⁹ Not known; Atkinson suggests Helicon in Boeotia.

³⁶⁰ Hesiod, *Theogony*, 50–5.

³⁶¹ Cf. Ausonius, 15. 77, for a different threefold division.

avoid music because of the associated pagan superstitions if there is a possibility of gleaning from it something of value for understanding holy scripture. Nor, on the other hand, should we be captivated by the vanities of the theatre if we are discussing something to do with lyres or other instruments that may help us appreciate spiritual truths. 72. We were not wrong to learn the alphabet just because they say that the god Mercury was its patron,³⁶⁷ nor should we avoid justice and virtue just because they dedicated temples to justice and virtue and preferred to honour these values not in their minds, but in the form of stones. A person who is a good and a true Christian should realize that truth belongs to his Lord, wherever it is found, gathering and acknowledging it even in pagan literature, but rejecting superstitious vanities and deploring and avoiding those who ‘though they knew God did not glorify him as God or give thanks but became enfeebled in their own thoughts and plunged their senseless minds into darkness. Claiming to be wise they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for the image of corruptible mortals and animals and reptiles.’³⁶⁸73. But to analyse this whole matter more closely—and it is something of the greatest importance—there are two kinds of learning pursued even in pagan society. One comprises things which have been instituted by humans, the other things already developed, or divinely instituted, which have been observed by them. Of those instituted by humans, some are superstitious, some not.⁷⁴ Something instituted by humans is superstitious if it concerns the making and worshipping of idols, or the worshipping of the created order or part of it as if it were God, or if it involves certain kinds of consultations or contracts³⁶⁹ about meaning arranged and ratified with demons, such as the enterprises involved in the art of magic, which poets tend to mention rather than to teach.³⁷⁰ From this category—only their vanity is even more reckless—come the books of haruspices and augurs. 75. To this category belong all the amulets³⁷¹ and remedies which the medical profession also condemns, whether these consist of incantations, or certain marks which

³⁶⁷ A point conceded even by Tertullian (*De Corona* 8. 2).

³⁶⁸ Rom. 1: 21–3.

³⁶⁹ To be explained in sections 87–95.

³⁷⁰ Vergil (*Aen.* 4. 478–98), and Lucan (*Bellum Civile* 6. 413–830), among many. It appears that Augustine wishes to defend the poets from blame here.

³⁷¹ Literally ‘bindings’, of which amulets may be one type. There is an apposite survey of ancient superstition in Atkinson, ‘Commentary on *De Doctrina Christiana*’, 171–82.

their exponents call ‘characters’, or the business of hanging certain things up and tying things to other things, or even somehow making things dance.³⁷⁵ The purpose of these practices is not to heal the body, but to establish certain secret or even overt meanings. They call these ‘physical’ matters, using this bland name to give the impression that they do not involve a person in superstition but are by nature beneficial. So, for example, ear-rings on the tip of one ear, or rings of ostrich bone on the fingers, or the advice given you when hiccuping to hold your left thumb with your right hand. 76. Besides all this there are thousands of utterly futile practices—do this if a part of your body suddenly twitches, do that if a stone or a dog or a slave comes between you and a friend as you walk together. The habit of treading on a stone as if it were a threat to one's friendship is less offensive than cuffing an innocent boy who happens to run between people walking together. But it is nice to record that such boys are sometimes avenged by dogs: some people are so superstitious that they go as far as striking a dog who comes between them, but they do so to their cost, because as a result of this inane remedy the dog sometimes sends its assailant straight to a real doctor. 77. Other examples are these: treading on the threshold when you pass in front of your own house; going back to bed if you sneeze while putting on your shoes; returning inside your house if you trip up while leaving it; or, when your clothing is eaten by mice, worrying more about the premonition of future disaster than about the present damage. Cato had a witty saying about this: when approached by someone who said that mice had been nibbling his slippers he replied that this was not an omen, but would certainly have been if the slippers had been nibbling the mice.³⁷⁶ 78. We must not omit from this category of deadly superstition the people called *genethliaci* because of their study of natal days, or now in common parlance *mathematici* (astrologers).³⁷⁷ Although they investigate the true position of the stars at a person's birth and sometimes actually succeed in working it out, the fact that they use it to try to predict our activities and the consequences of these activities is a grave error and amounts to selling uneducated people into a wretched form of slavery. 79. When free people go to see such an astrologer,

³⁷⁵ Atkinson's (179–80) suggestion *salutandis* (‘greeting’) is perhaps too ordinary an activity for this context.

³⁷⁶ This quip is otherwise unattested, but *ben trovato* (cf. Cic. *De Divinatione* 2.51). For another such mouse-joke, *ibid.* 2. 59.

³⁷⁷ Cf. *De Div. Quaest.* 45. 1, where Augustine notes that the term was once confined to astronomers. On Augustine's ‘struggle with astrology’ in general, see F. van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop* (London, 1961), 60–7.

they pay money for the privilege of coming away as slaves of Mars or Venus, or rather all the stars to which those who first made this error and then offered it to posterity gave either the names of animals, because they resembled animals, or the names of people, in order to honour particular people. It is no surprise that even in relatively recent times the Romans tried to consecrate the star we call Lucifer in the name of, and in honour of, Caesar.³⁸¹ 80. And indeed this might have been done, and become sanctified by tradition, had not Venus his ancestress, though she had never possessed it or even sought to possess it in her lifetime, already taken the name, like a piece of property, and did not transfer it in any legal way to her heirs. For when a title was vacant, and not held in the name of any previous deceased, the usual practice was followed. We call the months July and August after the human beings Julius Caesar and Augustus Caesar, and not by their old names of Quinctilis and Sextilis. So it is easy for anyone who so wishes to understand that those planets too previously moved in the sky without their present names, but that when people died whose memory the populace was compelled by royal power, or disposed by human vanity, to honour they gave the names of the deceased to the heavenly bodies and fancied that they were raising to heaven people who as far as they themselves were concerned were dead. 81. But whatever men may call them, the heavenly bodies, which God made and arranged as he wished, certainly exist, and have fixed orbits from which the seasons derive their differences and variations. It is easy to record the details of these orbits when a person is born, according to the rules which they have invented and codified. Holy scripture condemns them when it says, 'For if they were able to know so much that they could judge the world, how is it that they did not discover its Lord more easily?'³⁸²82. But the idea of using this data to predict the character and future actions and experiences of the new-born is a great mistake, and indeed great folly. To those who have learnt that such things are better unlearned this superstition is without the slightest doubt invalid.³⁸³ (In what follows constellations is their name for the diagrams of the positions occupied by the stars at the birth of the person about whom these wretched people are consulted by people even more wretched.) Now it can happen

³⁸¹ Probably Julius Caesar, in view of the alleged descent from Venus, but corroboratory evidence for this proposal is lacking. Augustine's pseudo-legal explanation is pure burlesque.

³⁸² Wisd. 13: 9.

³⁸³ The following argument was commonly used, and occasionally refuted, by pagan writers as well as Christian ones (Atkinson, 'Commentary on *De Doctrina Christiana*', 188–92). Augustine uses it in several places, including *Conf.* 7. 6. 8–10 and *Civ. Dei* 5. 1–6.

that some twins follow one another so closely out of the womb that no interval of time can be perceived between them and recorded in terms of constellations. 83. It follows that some twins have the same constellations, and yet their actions and experiences turn out to be not the same but often quite different.³⁸⁶ One may live to be blissfully happy, the other to be desperately unhappy, like Esau and Jacob who, we are told, were born as twins with Jacob, the second to be born, holding in his hand the foot of his brother born before him.³⁸⁷ 84. The day and hour of these births, certainly, could only have been recorded in terms of a single constellation common to both. But the vast difference between the two in terms of character and achievement, suffering and success, is attested by scripture and is now common knowledge among all peoples. 85. It is not pertinent to say, as they do, that the small interval, the tiny fraction of time that separates the birth of twins is of great significance in view of the nature of the universe and the great speed of the heavenly bodies. Even if I conceded that it was of the utmost significance, it would still not be discoverable by the astrologer in the constellations from which he claims to make predictions. 86. Since he cannot trace it in his constellations, which when examined are bound to be identical, whether he is consulted about Jacob or about his brother, what use is it to him if there is a difference in the heavens, which he thoughtlessly and casually belittles, but no difference in his diagram, which he earnestly and pointlessly beholds? So these ideas too, because they involve signs instituted by human presumption, must be classed among those contracts and agreements made with devils.⁸⁷ In this way it happens that, by some inscrutable divine plan, those who have a desire for evil things are handed over to be deluded and deceived according to what their own wills deserve. They are deluded and deceived by corrupt angels, to whom in God's most excellent scheme of things this lowest part of the world has been subjected by the decree of divine providence. As a result of these delusions and deceptions it has come about that these superstitious and deadly kinds of divination actually do tell of past and future things, which happen exactly as predicted; many things happen to observers in accordance with their observations, so that as they are caught

³⁸⁶ Cf. *Conf.* 7. 6. 8–10 and *De Div. Quaest.* 45.

³⁸⁷ Gen. 25: 25.

up in them they may become ever more inquisitive and entrap themselves more and more in the manifold snares of this most deadly error. 88. This is a kind of spiritual fornication, and in the interests of spiritual health scripture has not failed to mention it. It did not warn the soul by forbidding the practice of these things on the grounds that its teachers utter falsehoods; it has actually said, 'If they tell you and it happens in that way, do not trust them'.³⁹³ The fact that the ghost of the dead Samuel prophesied the truth to King Saul³⁹⁴ does not make the wickedness of summoning that ghost any less abhorrent. Nor did the fact that (in Acts)³⁹⁵ a soothsayer bore true testimony to the Lord's apostles lead Paul to spare that spirit rather than cleanse the woman by rebuking the demon and driving it out.⁸⁹ So all the specialists³⁹⁶ in this kind of futile and harmful superstition, and the contracts, as it were, of an untrustworthy and treacherous partnership established by this disastrous alliance of men and devils, must be totally rejected and avoided by the Christian. 'It is not', to quote the apostle, 'because an idol is something, but because whatever they sacrifice they sacrifice it to devils and not to God that I do not want you to become the associates of demons.'³⁹⁷ 90. What the apostle said about idols and the sacrifices made in their honour must guide our attitude to all these fanciful signs which draw people to the worship of idols or to the worship of the created order or any parts of it as if they were God, or which relate to this obsession with remedies and other such practices. They are not publicly promulgated by God in order to foster the love of God and one's neighbour, but they consume the hearts of wretched mortals by fostering selfish desires for temporal things. So in all these teachings we must fear and avoid this alliance with demons, whose whole aim, in concert with their leader, the devil, is to cut off and obstruct our return to God. 91. Just as there are deceptive human ideas of human origin about the stars, which God created and ordered, so there are many ideas, committed to paper by many writers, apparently derived systematically from human surmises, about everything which is born or somehow comes into being by the workings of divine

³⁹³ Deut. 13: 2–3.

³⁹⁴ 1 Kgs. (1 Sam.) 28: 11–19, discussed in the contemporary *Diversae Quaestiones ad Simplicianum* 2, 3, and later in the sixth of *Octo Dulcitii Quaestiones*.

³⁹⁵ Acts 16: 16–18.

³⁹⁶ Retaining *artifices*, read in most manuscripts of both Augustine and Eusebius, which makes good sense provided that *pacta* is not in apposition with it; as Schaüblin suggested, *et* should be added, but the lacuna may be larger.

³⁹⁷ 1 Cor. 10: 19–20.

providence—I mean things which happen abnormally, like a mule giving birth or something being struck by lightning. 92. The influence of all these things varies in proportion to the extent of the agreement with demons achieved by presumptuous minds through such kinds of common language. But they are all brimful of dangerous curiosity, agonising worry, and deadly bondage. They were not observed as a result of their influence, but they gained their influence as a result of being observed and recorded. This is how they came to have different effects on different people, according to their particular thoughts and fancies. Spirits who wish to deceive someone devise appropriate signs for each individual to match those in which they see him caught up through his speculations and the conventions he accepts. 93. So (by way of example) the single letter which is written like a cross means one thing to Greeks and another to Latin-speakers, and has meaning not by nature but by agreement and convention; therefore a person who knows both languages does not, if he wants to say something in writing to a Greek, write that letter with the same meaning as it has when he writes to a Latin speaker. And the word *beta*, consisting of the same sounds in both languages, is the name of a letter in Greek, but a vegetable in Latin. When I say *lege* a Greek understands one thing by these two syllables, but a Latin-speaker something else.³⁹⁹ 94. All these meanings, then, derive their effect on the mind from each individual's agreement with a particular convention. As this agreement varies, so does their effect. People did not agree to use them because they were already meaningful; rather they became meaningful because people agreed to use them. Likewise the signs by which this deadly agreement with demons is achieved have an effect that is in proportion to each individual's attention to them. 95. This is clearly demonstrated by the practice of augurs, who, both before and after making their observations, deliberately avoid seeing birds in flight or hearing their cries, because these signs are null and void unless accompanied by the observer's agreement. 96. Having eliminated and uprooted these things from the Christian mind we must in turn consider those human institutions which are not superstitious, that is, ones established not with demons but with men. All things which are meaningful to

³⁹⁹ 'Speak' and 'read' respectively. Latin *beta* is 'beet'.

humans just because humans have decided that they should be so, are human institutions. Some of them are superfluous and self-indulgent, others are useful and necessary. 97. If the signs made by actors while dancing were naturally meaningful, rather than meaningful as a result of human institution and agreement, an announcer would not have indicated to the Carthaginians, as each actor danced, what the dance meant, as he did in earlier days. Many old men still remember this, and we often hear them talking about it. It is quite credible, for even now if a person unfamiliar with these frivolities goes to the theatre his rapt attention to them is pointless unless someone tells him what the movements mean. 98. Yet everyone aims at some degree of similarity when they use signs, making signs as similar as possible to the things which are signified. But because one thing can be similar to another in many ways, these signs are not generally understood unless accompanied by agreement. 99. In the case of pictures and statues and other such representations, especially those made by experienced artists, nobody who sees the representation fails to recognize the things which they resemble. This whole category should be classed among superfluous human institutions, except when it makes a difference why or where or when or by whose authority one of them is made. Finally, the thousands of fictional stories and romances, which through their falsehoods give people great pleasure, are human institutions. Indeed, nothing should be thought more peculiar to mankind than lies and falsehoods,⁴⁰¹ which derive exclusively from mankind itself. 100. But there are useful and necessary institutions, established with men by men; such things as the conventional differences in dress and in adornment of the body, designed to distinguish sex or rank, and countless kinds of coded meanings without which society would function less smoothly, or not at all, and everything in the realm of weights and measures, coinage, and currency, which are peculiar to individual states and peoples, and so on. If these were not human institutions they would not differ between different peoples, nor would they be subject to change at the whim of the authorities in each country. 101. This whole area of human institutions which contribute to the necessities of life should in no way be avoided by the Christian; indeed, within reason, they should be studied and committed to memory.

⁴⁰¹ See preface, 17 n.

102. There are some human institutions which are modelled on natural ones⁴⁰⁸ or at any rate similar to them. Those which involve an alliance with demons are, as I have said, to be completely rejected and abhorred, but those which men practise along with their fellow-men are to be adopted, in so far as they are not self-indulgent and superfluous. This applies especially to the letters of the alphabet, without which reading would be impossible, and (up to a point) to the multiplicity of languages, which I discussed above.⁴⁰⁹ 103. In this category, too, are the symbols of shorthand, learnt by those who are now properly known as stenographers. These are useful, and it is not wrong to learn them; they do not involve us in superstition or undermine us with self-indulgence, provided that limited time is spent on them and that they do not become an obstacle to the more important things which they should help us to obtain.¹⁰⁴ Now those elements of human tradition which men did not establish but discovered by investigation, whether they were enacted in time or instituted by God, should not be considered human institutions, no matter where they are learnt. Some of these concern the physical senses, others concern the mind. The former we either take on trust when they are told to us, or understand when they are demonstrated, or infer when they are experienced.¹⁰⁵ Whatever the subject called history reveals about the train of past events is of the greatest assistance in interpreting the holy books, even if learnt outside the church as part of primary education. Many problems are often investigated by us using Olympiads and the names of consuls.⁴¹⁰ Ignorance of the consulships in which the Lord was born and died⁴¹¹ has led many to the erroneous idea that the Lord suffered at the age of 46, because it was said by the Jews that their temple (which represented the Lord's body)⁴¹² was built in forty-six years. 106. We have it on the authority of the gospel⁴¹³ that he was baptized at the age of about 30; the number of years that he lived after that could be inferred from the pattern of his activities, but is in fact more clearly and reliably established, beyond any shadow of doubt, by a comparison of secular history with the gospel. It will then be seen that there was some point in the statement that the temple was built in forty-six years: since the

⁴⁰⁸ These 'natural' institutions—the adjective is not used elsewhere in this context—are those observed by man and divinely instituted, of which discussion begins in 2.104.
⁴⁰⁹ 2.50.

⁴¹⁰ Greek reckoning was based on the period of four years between successive Olympic Games, while the Romans used the names of the two consuls in each year.

⁴¹¹ In fact the chronicle of Eusebius/Jerome used the regnal years of emperors.

⁴¹² John 2: 19–20. Cf. 2. 67.

⁴¹³ Luke 3: 23.

number cannot be explained in terms of the Lord's age, it must be explained as an abstruse lesson about the human body, which the only son of God, by whom everything was made,⁴¹⁸ did not disdain to put on for our sake. 107. On the usefulness of history—leaving aside Greek scholars—I cite the major problem which was solved by my good friend Ambrose. A scandalous accusation was levelled by readers and admirers of Plato, who had the nerve to say that our Lord Jesus Christ had learnt all his ideas—which they cannot but marvel at and proclaim—from the works of Plato, since, undeniably, he lived long before our Lord's coming in the flesh. 108. After examining secular history the aforementioned bishop discovered that Plato went to Egypt (where the prophet then was) at the time of Jeremiah,⁴¹⁹ and demonstrated that it was surely more likely that Plato had been introduced to our literature by Jeremiah, and that it was this that enabled him to learn and write the things for which he is justly praised. In fact the literature of the Hebrew race, in which monotheism first made its appearance, and from which our Lord came according to the flesh,⁴²⁰ was not preceded even by Pythagoras,⁴²¹ from whose followers they claim that Plato learnt his theology. So as a result of studying the chronology it is much easier to believe that the pagans took everything that is good and true in their writings from our literature than that the Lord Jesus Christ took his from Plato—a quite crazy idea. 109. Historical narrative also describes human institutions of the past, but it should not for that reason itself be counted among human institutions. For what has already gone into the past and cannot be undone must be considered part of the history of time, whose creator and controller is God. There is a difference between describing what has been done and describing what must be done. History relates past events in a faithful and useful way, whereas the books of haruspices and similar literature set out to teach things to be performed or observed, and offer impertinent advice, not reliable information. 110. There is also a kind of narration akin to demonstration, by which things in the present, and not the past, are communicated to people unfamiliar with them. In this category are various studies of topography and zoology, and of trees, plants,

⁴¹⁸ John 1: 3.

⁴¹⁹ Augustine later realized his mistake in claiming that Ambrose had made Plato and Jeremiah contemporaries (*Retract.* 2. 30. 2; cf. *Civ. Dei* 8. 11). According to E. Molland, 'Three Passages in Augustine', *Serta Eitremiana* (Symbolae Osloenses Supplement XI; Oslo, 1942), 112–7, he misquoted or misremembered Ambrose's lost work *De Sacramentis sive de Philosophia*.

⁴²⁰ Rom. 9: 5.

⁴²¹ Of the late sixth century BC .

stones, and other such things. I have dealt with this category earlier⁴²⁴ and explained that such knowledge is valuable in solving puzzles in scripture, but is not to be used in place of certain signs to provide the remedies or devices of some superstition. I distinguished this category too from the one that is lawful and open to Christians. For it is one thing to say, ‘if you drink this plant in powdered form your stomach will stop hurting’, and another to say, ‘if you hang this plant round your neck your stomach will stop hurting’. In the one case the health-giving mixture is commendable, in the other the superstitious meaning is damnable. 111. But in the absence of incantations or invocations or ‘characters’⁴²⁵ it is often doubtful whether the thing tied on or attached in some way for healing the body works by nature—in which case it may be used freely—or succeeds by virtue of some meaningful association; in this case, the more effectively it appears to heal, the more a Christian should be on guard. Where the explanation of its power is not apparent, it is the attitude of the user that matters, as far as physical healing or treatment, whether in medicine or in agriculture, is concerned.112. In astronomy—scripture mentions just a few things here—we have a case not of narration but demonstration. The orbit of the moon, which is regularly used to fix the annual celebration of our Lord's passion, is familiar to very many people, but very few have infallible knowledge about the rising or setting or any other movements of the other heavenly bodies. 113. In itself, this knowledge, although not implicating one in superstition, does not give much help—almost none, in fact—in interpreting the divine scripture and is really more of a hindrance, since it demands the fruitless expenditure of effort. Because it is akin to the deadly error of those who prophesy fatuously about fate, it is more convenient and honourable to despise it. But as well as the demonstration of things in the present it has something in common with narration of the past, because one may systematically argue from the present position and movement of the stars to their courses in the past. It also makes possible systematic predictions about the future, which are not speculative and conjectural but firm and certain; but we should not try to extract something of relevance to our own actions and experiences, like

⁴²⁴ 2. 59.

⁴²⁵ Cf. 2. 75.

the maniacs who cast horoscopes, but confine our interest to the stars themselves. 114. Just as someone who studies the moon can say, after examining how large it is today, how large it was so many years ago, or how large it will be in so many years' time, so in the same way skilled astronomers have learnt to pronounce about each of the stars. I have now explained my position on this whole subject, as far as its practical uses are concerned.115. In the case of the other arts, by which something is manufactured, whether it be an artefact that remains after a craftsman has worked on it (like a house or a stool or a vessel of some kind, and so on), or whether they provide some service for God to work with (like medicine, agriculture, or navigation), or whether the whole end product consists in action (as in dancing, running, and wrestling)—in all these arts knowledge gained from past experiences causes future ones to be inferred. None of these craftsmen moves a muscle at his work except to link his experience of the past with his plans for the future. 116. In human life knowledge of these things is to be used sparingly and in passing, and not in order to make things—unless a particular task demands it, which is not my concern now—but to assist our judgement, so that we are not entirely unaware of what scripture wishes to convey when it includes figurative expressions based on these arts.117. That leaves subjects which concern not the physical senses but mental reasoning. Dominant here are the subjects of logic and number, but logic is of paramount importance in understanding and resolving all kinds of problems in the sacred texts. But one must beware of indulging a passion for wrangling and making a puerile show of skill in trapping an opponent. There are many 'sophisms', as they are called, or invalid deductions, framed as a rule in the guise of valid ones, designed to trap not just dull people but also clever ones who are less than consistently alert. 118. The following proposition was put by X to Y: 'You are not what I am.' Y agreed; that was, after all, true up to a point, or else Y was being simple-minded because of X's deviousness. X added, 'I am a man', and when Y granted this too, he concluded 'Therefore you are not a man'. This kind of captious argument is, in my opinion, deplored by scripture in the passage where it says 'The person

who speaks sophistically is odious'.⁴²⁸ (But the word 'sophistical' is also applied to a style which is not captious, but goes in for verbal ornament on a scale that does not suit a serious writer.)¹¹⁹ There are also such things as valid logical syllogisms based on false statements, which attack a mistake made by an opponent. But these are advanced by honest and clever people to embarrass the person whom they are seeking to attack and make him abandon his misconception, by showing that if he chooses to stick to it he is logically compelled to uphold what he condemns. The apostle Paul was not advancing true statements when he said, 'neither did Christ rise', and 'our preaching is in vain',⁴²⁹ and 'your faith is in vain', and then other things, which are completely false; because Christ did rise, and the preaching of those who reported this was not in vain, nor was the faith of those who had believed it. But these falsehoods were deduced quite validly from the proposition that there is no resurrection of the dead. ¹²⁰ Because these propositions were true if it is the case that the dead do not rise, the resurrection of the dead will follow when these falsehoods are refuted. There are, then, valid syllogisms based not only on true propositions but also on false ones; it is easy to learn which of them are valid even in schools outside the church. But the truth of propositions must be sought in the church's holy books.¹²¹ The validity of syllogisms is not something instituted by humans, but observed and recorded by them, so that the subject may be taught or learnt. It is built into the permanent and divinely instituted system of things. The historian does not himself produce the sequence of events which he narrates, and the writer on topography or zoology or roots or stones does not present things instituted by humans, and the astronomer who points out the heavenly bodies and their movements does not point out something instituted by himself or any other person; likewise the logician who says 'since the consequent is false, the antecedent must be false' may be saying something perfectly true, but does not himself make it true, for he only points out the truth of it. ¹²² The above quoted text of Paul is an instance of this rule; for the antecedent was that there was no resurrection of the dead, as claimed by those whose error the apostle wanted to demolish. From that antecedent, by which

⁴²⁸ Eccclus. 37: 23.

⁴²⁹ 1 Cor. 15: 13–14. This is analysed in terms of Stoic logic, which is used throughout the following passage: see Jackson, 'Theory of Signs', 39–40.

they maintained that there was no resurrection of the dead, the statement 'nor did Christ rise' logically follows. But that conclusion is false, since Christ did rise; so the antecedent too is false. The antecedent was that there is no resurrection of the dead; therefore there is a resurrection of the dead. 123. All of which may be put briefly like this: if there is no resurrection of the dead, Christ did not rise either; but Christ did rise, so there is a resurrection of the dead. This fact, then—that by refuting the consequent you necessarily refute the antecedent too—was not instituted but pointed out by man. This rule relates to the validity of deductions, and not to the truth of propositions.

124. But in this last statement about the resurrection, the logical deduction was valid, and the actual proposition expressed in the conclusion was true. There may, however, be a valid deduction using false propositions, as in the following example. Suppose someone granted that 'if a snail is an animal, it has a voice'. With this granted, it is then shown that a snail does not have a voice, and the deduction made—because when a conclusion is refuted the antecedent is also refuted—that a snail is not an animal. This proposition is false, but validly derived from the false premiss that was granted. 125. So whereas the truth of a proposition holds good through itself alone, the truth-value of a syllogistic conclusion is established from what the disputant believes or concedes. This explains why, as I said before, a false proposition is introduced in a valid process of reasoning to make the person whose error we wish to correct ashamed to have held opinions with consequences that he can see must be rejected. It is now easy to understand that there can be invalid deductions from true statements, just as there are valid ones from false statements. Suppose that someone put the proposition, 'if X is just, he is good', and that this was granted; that he then said, 'but X is not just', and then, with that granted, added the conclusion 'so X is not good'. 126. Even if all these statements were true, the deduction is not valid. For although it is necessarily the case that an antecedent is refuted by the refutation of the consequent, it is not the case that a consequent is refuted by the refutation of an antecedent. It is correct to say 'If he is an orator, he is a man', but if you then add the minor premiss, 'he is not an orator', it will not follow that 'he is not therefore a man'.

127. So knowing the rules of valid deduction is not the same thing as knowing the truth of propositions. In logic one learns about valid and invalid inference, and contradiction. A valid inference is 'if he is an orator he is a man'; an invalid one is 'if he is a man, he is an orator'; a contradictory one is 'if he is a man, he is a quadruped'. In these cases a judgement is made about the actual deduction. On the other hand, where the truth of propositions is concerned, it is the actual propositions in themselves, not their logical relationships, that need to be examined. But when uncertain propositions are combined with true and certain ones in a valid process of reasoning, it necessarily follows that they too become certain. 128. Some people give themselves airs when they have learnt the rules of valid deduction, as if the truth of propositions resided in that. And conversely some people, although they often hold a true opinion, wrongly despise themselves for being ignorant of the laws of inference, although it is better to know that there is a resurrection of the dead than to know that if there is no resurrection of the dead it necessarily follows that Christ did not rise either. 129. The study of definition, division, and classification, though often applied to false things, is not in itself false; and it was not instituted by man, but discovered as part of the way things are. For just because it is often applied by poets to their fables and by false philosophers or heretics (in other words, false Christians) to the tenets of their misguided systems, that does not make it wrong to say that in defining or dividing or classifying something you must not include something irrelevant or leave out something that is relevant. This is true, even if the things being defined or classified are not true. 130. Falsehood itself can be defined—we might say that falsehood is the description of something which is not actually in the state in which it is asserted to be, or put it in some other way—and the definition may be correct, although what is false cannot be true. We may also subdivide it, saying that there are two kinds of falsehood, one consisting of things which cannot possibly be true, another of things which are not true, but could be. 131. If you say that seven and three make eleven, you are saying something that cannot possibly be true, but if you say, for example, that it rained on New Year's Day, although in fact it

did not, you are saying something which could have been true. So the definition and subdivision of falsehoods may be perfectly correct, although the falsehoods themselves are certainly not true.¹³² There are also certain rules of the more flamboyant discipline now called eloquence,⁴³³ which are valid in spite of the fact that they can be used to commend falsehood. Since they can also be used to commend the truth, it is not the subject itself that is reprehensible, but the perversity of those who abuse it. It is not the result of human institution that the expression of love wins over one's listeners,⁴³⁴ or that a brief and lucid narrative communicates facts efficiently, or that variety holds the attention without creating boredom; these and other such observations are true whether applied to true matters or false, to the extent that they cause something to be known or believed, or influence minds to seek or to avoid something. It was discovered that these things were true, not decided that they should be true. 133. But when this subject is learnt, it has to be used in communicating what has already been understood rather than in the actual process of understanding. The rules about syllogisms and definitions and classifications, on the other hand, greatly help people to understand, provided that they avoid the error of thinking that when they have mastered them they have learnt the actual truth about the happy life. 134. But it is usually the case that people develop the skills which the learning of these details is meant to develop more easily than they pick up the tortuous and rebarbative lessons of their teachers.⁴³⁵ It is as if someone who wanted to give rules about walking were to tell you that your back foot should not be raised until you have put down your front foot, and then describe in minute detail how you should move the joints of your limbs and knees. He would be right; walking in any other way is impossible. But people find it easier to walk by actually doing these things than by paying attention to them as they do them or by assimilating rules when they hear them. 135. Those who are unable to walk pay much less heed to instructions which they cannot follow in practice. Similarly, a clever person is as a rule quicker to see that a conclusion is invalid than to understand the relevant rules; the dull person fails to see it, but has even less chance of understanding the

⁴³³ Cf. 4. 6 for a similarly discursive definition, and Book 4 in general for a fuller treatment of the subject.

⁴³⁴ In technical terms, the *captatio benevolentiae* ('attempt to gain goodwill'), an important function of the *prooemium*. Cf. 4. 4, where all these points are referred to.

⁴³⁵ The colourful and sonorous Latin recalls the style and complaint of *Conf.*

rules. In all these matters it is often true that the pleasure derived from the open display of truth is greater than the assistance gained from discussing or examining it, though indeed these things can sharpen the intellect, which is a good thing provided that they do not also make people more mischievous or conceited or, in other words, more inclined to deceive others by plausible talk and questioning or to think that by learning these things they have done something marvellous which entitles them to consider themselves superior to sincere and unsophisticated people.¹³⁶ As for the study of number, it is surely clear even to the dullest person that it was not instituted by men, but rather investigated and discovered. Vergil wanted the first vowel of *Italia*—traditionally pronounced short—to be long, and made it long;⁴³⁹ but nobody can bring it about by willing it that three threes are not nine, or that they fail to make a squared number, or that the number nine is not thrice three, or one and a half times six, or twice . . . no number (for odd numbers⁴⁴⁰ are not divisible by two).¹³⁷ So whether numbers are considered purely as numbers or used in accordance with the laws that govern figures or sounds or other kinds of motion, they have fixed rules, which were not in any way instituted by human beings but discovered by the intelligence of human brains.¹³⁸ Some people take such delight in all this that they like to boast among the unlearned instead of asking why the things which they simply perceive to be true actually are true, or why things that are not only true but also unchangeable (as they have understood them to be) actually are unchangeable; nor do they, as they come from the visible and physical to the human mind and find this too to be changeable—because it is now clever, now not,⁴⁴¹ being placed between the unchangeable truth above them and the changeable things below them—relate all these things to the praise and love of God, realizing that it is from him that all things have their existence. Such people may seem learned, but are in no way wise.¹³⁹ So it seems to me that the following advice is beneficial for young people who are keen and intelligent, who fear God and seek a life of true happiness. Do not venture without due care into any branches of learning which are pursued outside the church of Christ, as if they were a means to attaining the

⁴³⁹ In *Aen.* 1. 2 and elsewhere. Schaüblin added *longam* to improve the sense.

⁴⁴⁰ According to Augustine in *Ep.* 3. 2 *intelligibiles numeri* admit of infinite increase but not infinite division, *sensibiles numeri* the reverse. Cf. H.-I. Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (Paris, 1938), 254 n. 3.

⁴⁴¹ Cf. 1. 19 n.

happy life, but discriminate sensibly and carefully between them. Those that are found to be of human institution—these come in many forms, because of the many different aims of those who instituted them, but offer little certainty, because of the speculative ideas of fallible people which underlie them—should be entirely repudiated and treated with disgust, especially if they involve an alliance with demonic powers established through a sort of contract or agreement to use particular esoteric meanings. Keep away too from the unnecessary and self-indulgent institutions of mankind, but in view of the demands of this present life do not neglect the human institutions vital to the cohesion of society. 140. As for the other branches of learning found in pagan society, apart from the study of things past or present which concern the bodily senses (including the productions and experimentations of the practical arts) and the sciences of logic and number,⁴⁴⁶ I consider nothing useful here. In all these subjects the watch-word must be ‘nothing in excess’,⁴⁴⁷ and nowhere more so than in those which concern the bodily senses and are subject to time or restricted in space. 141. Some scholars have made separate studies of all the words and names in Hebrew, Syriac, Egyptian, or any other language found in the holy scriptures, that are used without any interpretation;⁴⁴⁸ Eusebius made a separate study of chronology,⁴⁴⁹ because of the problems in the divine books which require its application. They did this in these specialized areas to save the Christian student a lot of bother over a few details. In the same way I can see the possibility that if someone suitably qualified were interested in devoting a generous amount of time to the good of his brethren he could compile a monograph classifying and setting out all the places, animals, plants, and trees, or the stones and metals, and all the other unfamiliar kinds of object mentioned in scripture. 142. It might also be possible to put together an explanatory account of numbers, confined to numbers mentioned in the divine scripture. Perhaps indeed some or all of this has already been done; I have come across much information on which I did not realize that good and learned Christians

⁴⁴⁶ The disciplines of definition and rhetoric (129–135) are ignored.

⁴⁴⁷ This ancient commonplace found its definitive Latin form in Ter. *Andria* 61.

⁴⁴⁸ Such onomastica of Hebrew and Aramaic names, and in particular those of Jerome, have been thoroughly studied by F. Wutz in ‘Onomastica Sacra’, *Texte und Untersuchungen*, 41 (1914).

⁴⁴⁹ See A. A. Mosshammer, *The Chronicle of Eusebius and Greek Chronographic Tradition* (Lewisburg, 1979), 29–83 and T. D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), 111–25.

had done research or written books. These things tend to remain unknown, whether because the bulk of scholars neglect them, or because jealous ones conceal them.⁴⁵⁶ 143. Whether the same can be done for logic, I do not know. I rather think not, because logic permeates the whole body of scripture, rather like a network of muscles, and so is of more help to the reader in resolving and revealing ambiguities—of which I will speak later⁴⁵⁷—than in understanding unfamiliar signs, which is my present concern.¹⁴⁴ Any statements by those who are called philosophers, especially the Platonists,⁴⁵⁸ which happen to be true and consistent with our faith should not cause alarm, but be claimed for our own use, as it were from owners who have no right to them. Like the treasures of the ancient Egyptians, who possessed not only idols and heavy burdens which the people of Israel hated and shunned but also vessels and ornaments of silver and gold, and clothes, which on leaving Egypt the people of Israel, in order to make better use of them, surreptitiously claimed for themselves (they did this not on their own authority but at God's command, and the Egyptians in their ignorance actually gave them the things of which they had made poor use)⁴⁵⁹—145. similarly all the branches of pagan learning contain not only false and superstitious fantasies and burden-some studies⁴⁶⁰ that involve unnecessary effort, which each one of us must loathe and avoid as under Christ's guidance we abandon the company of pagans, but also studies for liberated minds which are more appropriate to the service of the truth, and some very useful moral instruction, as well as the various truths about monotheism to be found in their writers. These treasures—like the silver and gold, which they did not create but dug, as it were, from the mines of providence, which is everywhere—which were used wickedly and harmfully in the service of demons must be removed by Christians, as they separate themselves in spirit from the wretched company of pagans, and applied to their true function,⁴⁶¹ that of preaching the gospel. As for their clothing—which corresponds to human

⁴⁵⁶ This comment could be the result of personal disappointment; had Augustine once perhaps approached Jerome for such a work?

⁴⁵⁷ In Book 3.

⁴⁵⁸ Augustine refers to those now known as neo-Platonists, and Plotinus in particular. Cf. 1. 16 n.

⁴⁵⁹ Exod. 3: 21–2 and 12: 35–6. This interpretation is also found in Origen (*PG* 11. 87–91), and in part resembles the figurative interpretation found in the Latin version of Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 4. 46–7, which may well date from this time. For such interpretations of Egypt, cf. Tert. *Scorpiae* 2, Hilary *In Ps.* 134. 19. The morality of the Hebrews' action is discussed by Augustine in *De Div. Quaest.* 53, *Enarr. Ps.* 104. 28 and *Contra Faustum* 71.

⁴⁶⁰ Aspects of pagan studies much more evident in *Conf.* than in the preceding chapters.

⁴⁶¹ On the concept of *usus iustus* and its application by Christians, see C. Gnllka, 'Usus iustus', *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte*, 24 (1980), 34–76.

institutions, but those appropriate to human society, which in this life we cannot do without—this may be accepted and kept for conversion to Christian purposes. 146. This is exactly what many good and faithful Christians have done. We can see, can we not, the amount of gold, silver, and clothing with which Cyprian, that most attractive writer and most blessed martyr, was laden when he left Egypt; is not the same true of Lactantius, and Victorinus, of Optatus, and Hilary,⁴⁶⁸ to say nothing of people still alive,⁴⁶⁹ and countless Greek scholars? This is what had been done earlier by Moses himself,⁴⁷⁰ that most faithful servant of God, of whom it is written that he was trained in ‘all the wisdom of the Egyptians’. 147. Pagan society, riddled with superstition, would never have given to all these men the arts which it considered useful—least of all at a time when it was trying to shake off the yoke of Christ and persecuting Christians—if it had suspected that they would be adapted to the purpose of worshipping the one God, by whom the worship of idols would be eradicated. But they did give their gold and silver and clothing to God's people as it left Egypt, little knowing that the things they were giving away would be put back into the service of Christ. The event narrated in Exodus was certainly a figure, and this is what it foreshadowed. (I say this without prejudice to any other interpretation of equal or greater importance.)¹⁴⁸ As students of the divine scriptures, equipped in this way, begin to approach the task of studying them in detail, they must ponder incessantly this phrase of the apostle Paul: ‘knowledge puffs up, but love builds up’.⁴⁷¹ In this way, even if they leave Egypt well provided for, they realize that without first observing the passover they cannot be saved. Now ‘Christ our Passover has been sacrificed’;⁴⁷² the sacrifice of Christ teaches us nothing more clearly than what he himself calls out, as if to those whom he sees suffering in Egypt under Pharaoh: ‘Come unto me, you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. My yoke is a soft one, and my burden light.’⁴⁷³ Who are these but the gentle and lowly in heart, people not puffed

⁴⁶⁸ On Lactantius see J. Quasten, *Patrology*, 2 (1953), 392–410 and R. M. Ogilvie, *The Library of Lactantius* (Oxford, 1978), and on the others [J. Quasten] A. di Berardino (ed.), *Patrology*, 4 (Eng. trans.: Westminster, Md., 1986), iv 36–61, 69–80, 122–7. The suggestion of J. Doignon (*Latomus*, 22 (1963), 795–805) that this list is a reply to a list of Christian writers made by Jerome in *Ep.* 58 to Paulinus of Nola is unlikely because of the different purposes of the two writers and the different choice of names.

⁴⁶⁹ These surely include Ambrose: see Introduction, p. xii.

⁴⁷⁰ Acts 7: 22.

⁴⁷¹ 1 Cor. 8: 1.

⁴⁷² 1 Cor. 5: 7.

⁴⁷³ Matt. 11: 28–30.

up by knowledge but built up by love? 149. Remember those who celebrated the Passover in days gone by, in its unreal and shadowy form; when the command was given to mark their gateposts with the blood of a lamb, they were also sprinkled with hyssop.⁴⁸¹ This is a lowly and gentle plant, but nothing is stronger or more penetrating than its roots, so that 'rooted and grounded in love' we may be able 'to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth'.⁴⁸² This refers to the Lord's cross. The breadth is the cross-beam, on which the hands were stretched out; the length is the part from the ground to the cross-beam, to which is fixed the whole body from the hands downward; the height is the part from the cross-beam up to the top, to which the head is attached; the depth is the hidden part, firmly set in the ground. 150. In the symbol of the cross every Christian act is inscribed: to do good in Christ and to hold fast resolutely to him, to hope for heaven, to avoid profaning the sacraments. If we are purified by such behaviour we will be able 'to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge'⁴⁸³—the love in which he, by whom everything was made,⁴⁸⁴ is equal to the Father—and so be filled with all the fullness of God. Hyssop also has a cleansing power, so that nobody should boast, with his head inflated⁴⁸⁵ by a knowledge of the wealth he has taken from Egypt. 'You will sprinkle me with hyssop', scripture says, 'and I shall be made clean; you will wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. You will give exultation and joy to my ears.'⁴⁸⁶ Then to follow that up it adds, to demonstrate that hyssop signifies cleansing from pride: 'the bones once abased will rejoice.'⁴⁸⁷ 151. The insignificance of the amount of gold, silver, and clothing which that people took away with it from Egypt, in comparison with the wealth that it later attained in Jerusalem, as shown particularly in the reign of Solomon,⁴⁸⁷ is the measure of the insignificance of all knowledge, I mean useful knowledge, that is collected from pagan books, when compared with the knowledge contained in the divine scriptures. For what a person learns independently of scripture is condemned there if it is harmful, but found there if it is useful. And when one has found there all the useful knowledge that can be learnt anywhere else, one will also find there, in much greater

⁴⁸¹ Exod. 12: 22.

⁴⁸² Eph. 3: 18, linked with the cross by Irenaeus (*Demonstr.* 34). See J. Danielou, *A History of Early Christian Doctrine*, 1, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* (London, 1964), 279–92.

⁴⁸³ Eph. 3: 19.

⁴⁸⁴ John 1: 3.

⁴⁸⁵ A verbal reminiscence of Persius 1. 14: *grande aliquid quod pulmo animae praelargus anbelet* ('something great for lungs prodigal of wind to pump out'), but with *pulmo* qualified by *tumidus* (cf. Verg. *Aen.* 10. 387). On Persius in Augustine see Hagendahl, *Augustine and the Latin Classics*, 2. 472–4, 692.

⁴⁸⁶ Ps. 50: 9–10 (51: 7–8).

⁴⁸⁷ 3 Kgs. (1 Kgs.) 10: 14–27.

abundance, things which are learnt nowhere else at all, but solely in the remarkable sublimity and the remarkable humility of the scriptures. 152. Readers furnished with such an education will not be held back by unfamiliar signs. Gentle and lowly in heart, peacefully subject to Christ, laden with a light burden, founded and rooted and built up in love, and incapable of being puffed up by knowledge, they should now proceed to consider and analyse the ambiguous signs in the scriptures, on which I will now endeavour to present, in my third book, such learning as the Lord deigns to deliver to me.

Book Three

1. The student who fears God earnestly seeks his will in the holy scriptures. Holiness makes him gentle, so that he does not revel in controversy; a knowledge of languages protects him from uncertainty over unfamiliar words or phrases, and a knowledge of certain essential things protects him from ignorance of the significance and detail of what is used by way of imagery. Thus equipped, and with the assistance of reliable texts derived from the manuscripts with careful attention to the need for emendation,⁴⁹² he should now approach the task of analysing and resolving the ambiguities of the scriptures. 2. To prevent himself from being misled by ambiguous signs, in so far as I can instruct him (it may indeed be the case that either because of great intellectual gifts or a clarity of mind that is the result of greater illumination than I have he scorns as elementary the methods which I wish to demonstrate)—but, as I began to say, in so far as I can instruct him, the student who is in the proper state of mind to accept my instruction should know that ambiguity in scripture resides either in literal or in metaphorical usages (as the terms were described in Book 2).⁴⁹³

3. When it is literal usages that make scripture ambiguous, we must first of all make sure that we have not punctuated or articulated the passage incorrectly. Once close consideration has revealed that it is uncertain how a passage should be punctuated and articulated,⁴⁹⁴ we must consult the rule of faith,⁴⁹⁵ as it is perceived through the plainer passages of the scriptures and the authority of the church. (I dealt adequately with this matter when speaking of things in Book 1).

4. But if both interpretations, or indeed all of them (supposing that there are several sides to the ambiguity) sound compatible with the faith, then it remains to consult the context—the preceding and following passages, which surround the ambiguity—in order to help us determine which of the several meanings that suggest

⁴⁹² On ancient *emendatio*, see J. E. G. Zetzel, *Latin Textual Criticism in Antiquity* (Salem, 1981), 206–10.

⁴⁹³ 2. 32–3.

⁴⁹⁴ Ancient readers often had to punctuate for themselves. See S. F. Bonner, *Education in Ancient Rome* (London, 1977), 220–2.

⁴⁹⁵ By this Augustine means the fundamentals of Christian doctrine outlined in various parts of Book 1. On the early history of the term, see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (London, 1972), 76–88.

themselves is supported by it, and which one lends itself to acceptable combinations with it.

5. Consider now the following examples. The well-known heretical punctuation⁴⁹⁹ ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and there was God’, giving a different sense in what follows (‘this Word was in the beginning with God’) refuses to acknowledge that the Word was God. This is to be refuted by the rule of faith, which lays down for us the equality of the members of the Trinity, and so we should say ‘and the Word was God’, and then go on, ‘this was in the beginning with God’. 6. The following ambiguous passage is not, on either interpretation, at odds with the faith, and therefore has to be resolved by its actual context. The apostle says, ‘And I know not which to choose; I am torn in two directions having a desire to be dissolved and be with Christ, for that is much the best; to remain in the flesh is necessary on your account.’⁵⁰⁰ It is not in fact clear whether we should read ‘having a desire in two directions’ or ‘I am torn in two directions’, followed by ‘having a desire to be dissolved and be with Christ’. 7. But since the phrase ‘for that is much the best’ follows, it is clear that he says he has a desire for that which is best, so that although torn in two directions he feels a desire to do the one but an obligation to do the other (that is, a desire to be with Christ, but an obligation to remain in the flesh). The ambiguity is resolved by the presence of the single word ‘for’. Critics who remove this word have been led to the conclusion that he was apparently not only torn in two directions but also had a desire for two things.⁵⁰¹ 8. So the punctuation must be: ‘and I know not which to choose; I am torn in two directions’ [pause] ‘having a desire to be dissolved and be with Christ.’ And then, as if he were being asked why he has a desire for this, he says, ‘for it is much the best’. Why, then, is he torn in two directions? Because there is an obligation to remain, which he expresses thus: ‘to remain in the flesh is necessary on your account.’ 9. Where an ambiguity can be resolved neither by an article of faith nor by the actual context there is no objection to any punctuation which follows one of the meanings that suggest themselves. Such is the passage in Corinthians: ‘so having these

⁴⁹⁹ John 1: 1–2; the Arians are meant.

⁵⁰⁰ Phil. 1: 22–4. An English translation cannot illustrate the ambiguity, because its word-order, unlike the Latin word-order, determines the meaning. The point was important in debates with the Manichees: see *Conf.* 8. 10. 23–4.

⁵⁰¹ The conclusion is not inescapable; the omission of *enim* in the Vulgate did not close the question. In fact Augustine’s first argument is the stronger one.

promises, my dearest brethren, let us purify ourselves from all pollution of the flesh and the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. Welcome me; I have wronged no-one.⁵⁰⁸ It is uncertain whether we should read ‘let us purify ourselves from all pollution of the flesh and the spirit’, on the analogy of the phrase ‘so that she may be holy in body and spirit’,⁵⁰⁹ or ‘let us purify ourselves from all pollution of the flesh’, with a different sense emerging in what follows: ‘and perfecting holiness of the spirit in the fear of God. Welcome me . . .’ Such problems of punctuation are for the reader to resolve.

10. The points that I have just made about problems of punctuation also apply to the problems of reading aloud. These too, unless they are simply mistakes due to a reader's gross carelessness, are resolved by considering either the rules of faith or the surrounding context. If neither of these methods is used to resolve them they will none the less remain in dispute,⁵¹⁰ but in such a way that the reader will not be wrong however the passages are articulated. 11. If our faith did not prevent it—for we believe that God will not make accusations against his elect and that Christ will not condemn the elect—the following passage might be read in such a way that the question, ‘Who will make an accusation against God's elect?’⁵¹¹ is followed by a sort of answer in the words ‘God who justifies them’, and then, similarly, by the question, ‘Who is it that condemns them?’, and the answer, ‘Christ Jesus who died’. But since it would be crazy to believe this, it will be articulated as a *percontatio* followed by an *interrogatio*. 12. (The difference between these, according to ancient authorities, is that many answers may be given to the former, but only ‘yes’ and ‘no’ to the latter.)⁵¹² So it will be articulated in such a way that what follows the *percontatio* (‘Who will make an accusation against God's elect?’) is intoned interrogatively (‘God who justifies them?’), expecting the tacit answer ‘no’; and this is followed similarly by a *percontatio* (‘Who is it that condemns?’), and another *interrogatio* (‘Christ Jesus who died, but who rose again, who is at God's right hand, and who pleads for us?’), all of them expecting the tacit answer ‘no’. 13. But in the passage where he says ‘What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness’,⁵¹³ the text that follows will not make sense unless the question

⁵⁰⁸ 2 Cor. 7: 1–2. Again the English translation inevitably removes the ambiguity under discussion. It follows the usual and preferable interpretation of the passage.

⁵⁰⁹ 1 Cor. 7: 34.

⁵¹⁰ Schaublin considers the words *si neutrum horum adhibetur ad correctionem* to be an interpolation which weakens the sense; they do indeed, but not impossibly.

⁵¹¹ Rom. 8: 33–4.

⁵¹² For this distinction see *Quint.* 9. 2. 6 and Donatus on Ter. *Andria* 800.

⁵¹³ Rom. 9: 30.

‘What shall we say then?’ is followed by the reply ‘That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness.’ But I fail to see how to determine with what tone Nathaniel’s words *a Nazareth potest aliquid boni esse*⁵²⁰ should be articulated—whether they should be read as a statement with only the words ‘from Nazareth’ forming a question, or read entirely with the hesitant tone of a question. Neither interpretation is contrary to the faith.

14. Ambiguity is also present where the length of syllables is uncertain; and this too of course is relevant to reading aloud. In the sentence *non est absconditum a te os meum, quod fecisti in abscondito*⁵²¹ it is not obvious as one reads whether one should pronounce *os* with a short or long vowel. If it is made short, the singular of the word *ossa* is understood; if long, the singular of *ora*. 15. Such matters are settled by an inspection of the original: in Greek the word denotes not ‘mouth’, but ‘bone’. So the colloquial manner of speaking is often more effective than the propriety of literary language when it comes to signifying things. Indeed, I would prefer the sentence *non est absconditum a te ossum meum*, which includes a barbarism,⁵²² to one which because it is better Latin is less clear. Sometimes such doubts about the length of a syllable may be resolved by a nearby word which is relevant to the meaning, as in the sentence of the apostle Paul, *quae praedico vobis sicut praedixi, quoniam qui talia agunt regnum dei non possidebunt*.⁵²³ 16. If he had said simply *quae praedico vobis*, without adding *sicut praedixi*, it would be necessary to refer to a manuscript in the original language to find out whether to pronounce the middle syllable of the word *praedico* long or short.⁵²⁴ But in this case it is clear that it should be long; he said not *sicut praedicavi* but *sicut praedixi*. 17. As well as these ambiguities we must consider in a similar way those which do not concern punctuation or reading aloud, like the one in Thessalonians *Propterea consolati sumus fratres in vobis*.⁵²⁵ It is not clear whether *fratres* is in the vocative case or the

⁵²⁰ John 1: 46.

⁵²¹ Ps. 138: 15 (139: 15). Literally, ‘my face/bone, which you made in a hidden place, is not hidden from you’. *ossa* means ‘bones’, *ora* ‘faces’ or ‘mouths’.

⁵²² Cf. 2. 45 for *barbarismus*, and 4. 64–6 for the overriding importance of clarity. Augustine makes similar comments in *Enarr. Ps. 36, Sermon. 3. 6, 138. 15 (139. 15)*, and *Tract. Iob. 2. 14*. He does not champion barbarisms for their own sake, and uses them sparingly himself; see R. P.H. Green, ‘Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana* : Some Clarifications’, *Respublica Litterarum*, 15 (1992), 101–2.

⁵²³ Gal. 5: 21. ‘I warn you, as I have warned already, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.’

⁵²⁴ The former would mean ‘foretell’. Again, Augustine means ‘vowel’ rather than syllable.

⁵²⁵ 1 Thess. 3: 7.

accusative; neither reading would be contrary to the faith. But in Greek the corresponding case-forms are not identical, and so after inspecting the Greek we declare in favour of the vocative (equivalent to *o fratres*). 18. If a translator had chosen to say *Propterea consolationem habuimus, fratres, in vobis*, he would have been verbally less close, but there would be no doubting his meaning. Or indeed *nostrum* might be added, for hardly anyone would doubt that the vocative was being used in the phrase *Propterea consolati sumus, fratres nostri, in vobis*. But it is rather dangerous to allow such changes. This has been done in Corinthians, where the apostle says *cotidie morior, per vestram gloriam, fratres, quam habeo in Christo Iesu*.⁵²⁸ 19. one translator actually wrote *cotidie morior, per vestram iuro gloriam*, because in Greek there is a clear and unambiguous word signifying an oath. In the field of literal expressions, then, as far as the books of holy scripture are concerned, it is very unusual, and very difficult, to find cases of ambiguity which cannot be resolved either by the particular details of the context—which are a pointer to the writer's intention—or by a comparison of Latin translations or an inspection of the original language.

20. But the ambiguities of metaphorical words, about which I must now speak, require no ordinary care and attention. To begin with, one must take care not to interpret a figurative expression literally. What the apostle says is relevant here: 'the letter kills but the spirit gives life.'⁵²⁹ For when something meant figuratively is interpreted as if it were meant literally, it is understood in a carnal way. No 'death of the soul' is more aptly given that name than the situation in which the intelligence, which is what raises the soul above the level of animals, is subjected to the flesh by following the letter. 21. A person who follows the letter understands metaphorical words as literal, and does not relate what the literal word signifies to any other meaning. On hearing the word 'sabbath', for example, he interprets it simply as one of the seven days which repeat themselves in a continuous cycle; and on hearing the word 'sacrifice' his thoughts do not pass beyond the rituals performed with sacrificial beasts or fruits of the earth. It is, then, a miserable kind of spiritual slavery to interpret signs as things, and to be incapable of raising the mind's eye above the physical creation so as to absorb the eternal light.

⁵²⁸ 1 Cor. 15: 31. The problem is that *per* has various meanings, unlike the Greek π .

⁵²⁹ 2 Cor. 3: 6.

22. But the form this slavery took in the Jewish people was very different from the experience of other nations, since notwithstanding their enslavement to temporal things the idea of monotheism was presented to them in all sorts of ways. And although they observed the signs of spiritual things in place of the things themselves—not knowing what they related to—they nevertheless had an ingrained belief that such slavery made them acceptable to the single God of all, the God whom they were unable to see. This relationship, as the apostle Paul wrote,⁵³³ was like the protection of children by a pedagogue. 23. That is why the people who resolutely held fast to these signs were unable, when the time had come for them to be explained, to tolerate the Lord who disregarded them; and that is why their leaders engineered false accusations against him because he healed on the sabbath,⁵³⁴ and why the people, devoted to signs as if they were things, did not believe that he was God or that he had come from God, since he refused to follow these practices in the way that they were observed by the Jews. But those who did believe—those who became the first church of Jerusalem—clearly showed what an advantage it was to have had the protection of a pedagogue in this way; for the result was that the signs temporarily imposed on them in their slavery drew the thoughts of those who observed them to the worship of the one God who created heaven and earth. 24. Because they were very close to being spiritual—for although they did not know how to interpret them spiritually, the vows and signs concerned with the world and the flesh had at least taught them to worship the one eternal God—they were so receptive to the Holy Spirit that they sold all their possessions and placed the proceeds at the apostles' feet for distribution to the poor, dedicating themselves wholly to God.⁵³⁵ And so they formed a new temple, a temple whose earthly counterpart they had served previously. 25. It is not recorded that any Gentile churches did this; for those who thought of manufactured statues as gods were not found to be so spiritually aware. 26. If any of them ever did try to interpret these statues as signs, they related them to the worship and veneration of the created order. For what good is it to me that (for example) an image of Neptune is not thought of as a god in itself, but considered to represent the whole sea or all the fontibus proruunt? Sicut a quodam poeta illorum describitur, si bene recolo, ita dicente:

⁵³³ Gal. 3: 24.

⁵³⁴ Matt. 12: 1–14; Luke 6: 1–11.

⁵³⁵ Acts 4: 32–5.

Thou, father Neptune, whose hoary temples resound to the splash of the encircling sea, from whose mighty chin flows the great ocean, in whose hair rivers meander . . .⁵³⁸

27. Inside its attractive shell this husk is a jangle of fine-sounding stones; but it is the food of pigs, not men. (Anyone who knows the gospel knows my meaning.⁵³⁹) What good is it to me, then, that a representation of Neptune is given this significance, except perhaps to make me avoid both kinds of worship? As far as I am concerned, any statue is as far from being God as the whole sea is. But I admit that those who regard the works of men as gods are more bogged down in error than those who so regard the works of God. But we are instructed to love and worship the one God who created all these things of which they venerate images, whether they do so by treating them as gods or as signs or representations of gods. 28. If, then, it is a carnal form of slavery to follow a sign divinely instituted for a useful purpose rather than the thing that it was instituted to represent, is it not far worse to accept as things the humanly instituted signs of useless things? If you relate such signs to the actual things signified by them, and commit your soul to worshipping them, you will still not be free from the oppression and the delusion of this servile and carnal condition.²⁹ So Christian freedom has liberated those whom it found enslaved to useful signs—they were, so to speak, not that far away—and by interpreting the signs to which they were subjected has raised them to the level of the things of which these were signs. These people formed the churches of the holy Israelites. But as for those whom it found under the influence of useless signs, it has undermined not only their servile attention to such signs, but also the signs themselves; and it has eliminated them all, so that the Gentiles might turn away from the pollution of a horde of fictitious gods—something which scripture frequently, and literally, calls fornication—to the worship of the one God, and no longer live in slavery, even to useful signs, but rather exercise their minds by the discipline of understanding them spiritually. 30. A person enslaved by a

⁵³⁸ The author and context of this passage are unknown. Perhaps, as Riese suggested, it comes from the poem *Ponticon* (or *Pontica*), of which a fragment is extant: see E. Courtney (ed.), *The Fragmentary Latin Poets* (Oxford, 1993), 456.

⁵³⁹ Luke 15: 16. Cf. Jerome, *Ep.* 21. 13. 4.

sign is one who worships some thing which is meaningful but remains unaware of its meaning. But the person who attends to or worships a useful sign, one divinely instituted, and does realize its force and significance, does not worship a thing which is only apparent and transitory but rather the thing to which all such things are to be related. Such a person is spiritual and free—and this was true even in the era of slavery when the time was not yet ripe for carnal minds to receive the clarification of the signs by which they had to be disciplined, like oxen beneath a yoke. 31. Among such spiritual people were the patriarchs and prophets and all those in the people of Israel through whom the Holy Spirit provided us with the support and comfort of the scriptures. But at the present time, when a brilliant demonstration of our freedom has been revealed in the resurrection of our Lord, we are not oppressed by the tiresome necessity of attending to signs, even the signs which we now understand. Instead of many signs there are now but a few signs, simple when performed, inspiring when understood, and holy when practised, given to us by the teaching of our Lord himself and the apostles, such as the sacrament of baptism and the celebration of the Lord's body and blood. 32. When an individual understands these, he recognizes with an inner knowledge what they relate to, and consequently venerates them not because of carnal slavery but because of his spiritual freedom. And just as it is a mark of servile weakness to follow the letter and accept the signs rather than the things signified by them, so it is a mark of badly misguided error to interpret signs in a useless way. The person who does not understand what a sign means, but at least understands that it is a sign, is not himself subject to slavery. It is better to be dominated by unknown but useful signs than to interpret them in a useless way and so thrust one's neck, rescued from the yoke of slavery, into the toils of error.³³ As well as this rule, which warns us not to pursue a figurative (that is, metaphorical) expression as if it were literal, we must add a further one: not to accept a literal one as if it were figurative. We must first explain the way to discover whether an expression is literal or figurative. Generally speaking, it is this: anything in the divine discourse that cannot be related either to good morals or to the true faith should be taken as figurative. 34. Good morals have to do with our love of God and our neighbour, the true faith with our

understanding of God and our neighbour. The hope that each person has within his own conscience is directly related to the progress that he feels himself to be making towards the love and understanding of God and his neighbour. All this has been dealt with in Book 1.

35. But since the human race is prone to judge sins not by the strength of the actual lust, but rather by the standard of its own practices, people generally regard as culpable only such actions as men of their own time and place tend to blame and condemn, and regard as commendable and praiseworthy only such actions as are acceptable within the conventions of their own society. And so it happens that if scripture enjoins something at variance with the practices of its readers, or censures something that is not at variance with them, they consider the relevant expression to be figurative (always assuming that their minds are governed by the authority of the Word). 36. But scripture enjoins nothing but love, and censures nothing but lust, and moulds men's minds accordingly. Similarly, if their minds are taken over by a particular prejudice, people consider as figurative anything that scripture asserts to the contrary. But it asserts nothing except the catholic faith, in time past, present, and future. It narrates the past, foretells the future, and demonstrates the present, but all these things serve to nourish and strengthen this love, and to overcome and annihilate lust. 37. By love I mean the impulse of one's mind to enjoy God on his own account and to enjoy oneself and one's neighbour on account of God;⁵⁴¹ and by lust I mean the impulse of one's mind to enjoy oneself and one's neighbour and any corporeal thing not on account of God. What unbridled lust does to corrupt the mind and body is called wickedness; what it does to harm another person is called wrongdoing. 38. All sins can be divided into these two kinds, but wickedness comes first. Once it has depleted the mind and as it were bankrupted it, it rushes on to commit wrongdoing in order to remove the obstacles to wickedness or to find assistance for it. Similarly, what love does to benefit itself is self-interest, and what it does to benefit a neighbour is known as kindness. And here self-interest comes first, because nobody can do good to another out of resources which he does not possess. The more the realm of lust is destroyed, the more the realm of love is increased.

⁵⁴¹ For the notion of enjoying one's neighbour for God's sake, see 1. 79, and O'Donovan, '*Usus* and *Fructio*', 389 and 391.

39. Any harsh and even cruel word or deed attributed to God or his saints that is found in the holy scriptures applies to the destruction of the realm of lust. If the message is clear, it should not be treated as figurative and related to something else. For example, Paul's saying: 'You are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath, the day of the revelation of the just judgement of God, who will repay all people according to their works; eternal life to those who by persistence in well-doing seek glory and honour and immortality, but anger and fury to those who fractiously refuse to obey the truth and put their trust in iniquity. There will be tribulation and distress to every soul of man that does evil, first to the Jew and then to the Greek.'⁵⁴⁶ 40. But this was written to those whose destruction must accompany that of the lust itself, those who refused to overcome it. In cases where the realm of lust is overcome by a person once dominated by it, this perfectly clear saying applies: 'Those who belong to Jesus Christ have crucified their flesh along with its passions and desires.'⁵⁴⁷ Even here, admittedly, some words are used metaphorically, such as 'wrath of God' and 'crucified', 41. but they are not so many, or so unclear in expression, as to hide the sense and create allegory or obscurity, which is what I mean by figurative expression in the strict sense. On the other hand, Jeremiah's phrase 'Behold today I have established you over nations and kingdoms, to uproot and destroy, to lay waste and scatter'⁵⁴⁸ is, without doubt, entirely figurative, and so must be related to the aim that I mentioned above.⁴² Matters which seem like wickedness to the unenlightened, whether just spoken or actually performed, whether attributed to God or to people whose holiness is commended to us, are entirely figurative. Such mysteries are to be elucidated in terms of the need to nourish love. A person who makes more limited use of transient things than the moral conventions of his own society allow is either self-controlled⁵⁴⁹ or superstitious; a person whose use of them exceeds the limits set by the practice of good people in his society is either guilty of wickedness or an indication of some special significance. 43. In all such matters what is reprehensible is not the use made of things but the user's desire. No person in his right mind should ever think that the Lord's feet were anointed by a woman with precious

⁵⁴⁶ Rom. 2: 5–9.

⁵⁴⁷ Gal. 5: 24.

⁵⁴⁸ Jer. 1: 10.

⁵⁴⁹ Some manuscripts have *intemperans*, but it would be strange for Augustine to call such ascetics 'intemperate'.

ointment⁵⁵³ in the same way as the feet of self-indulgent and evil men are anointed at the sort of banquets which we abhor. A good perfume signifies a good reputation: anyone who enjoys this through the deeds of an upright life anoints Christ's feet in a figurative sense with a most precious perfume by following in his footsteps. 44. Again, what is generally speaking wicked in other people is the sign of something great in one who is divine or a prophet. Consorting with a prostitute is one thing in a depraved society, but something quite different in the prophecy of Hosea.⁵⁵⁴ And the fact that some people strip in their drunken, uninhibited parties does not make it immoral to be naked in the bath.⁴⁵ We must pay careful attention to the conduct appropriate to different places, times, and persons, in case we make rash imputations of wickedness. It is possible for a wise man to take some kind of costly food without any taint of greed or gluttony, and for an unwise one to yearn for junk food with a most disgusting outburst of greed. Or someone might have a healthy preference for eating fish, like our Lord, rather than lentils, like Abraham's grandson Esau,⁵⁵⁵ or barley, like cattle. 46. The fact that most animals are more restrained than we are is not the result of their cheaper diet. In all matters of this kind actions are made acceptable or unacceptable not by the particular things we make use of, but by our motives for using them and our methods of seeking them. 47. Righteous men of long ago visualized the kingdom of heaven as an earthly kingdom, and predicted it accordingly. In the interests of creating offspring there was a perfectly blameless practice for one man to have several wives. For the same reason it was not honourable for one woman to have several husbands; that does not make a woman more fertile, and it is indeed a form of immoral prostitution to seek either profit or children through promiscuity. 48. Given such social conventions, things that the saints of those ages could do without any lust—although they were doing something which cannot be done without lust nowadays—are not censured by scripture. Anything of this kind related there is to be understood not only historically and literally but also figuratively and prophetically, and interpreted according to the aim of love, whether it be love of God or love of one's neighbour, or both. 49. In ancient Rome it was

⁵⁵³ Matt. 26: 7–12; John 12: 1–7.

⁵⁵⁴ Hos. 1: 2–3.

⁵⁵⁵ Luke 24: 42; Gen. 25: 34.

considered wicked to wear ankle-length tunics or ones with sleeves,⁵⁵⁹ whereas now it is thought immoral for the upper classes not to have them when wearing tunics; so we must observe that in the use of all other such things there must be an absence of lust, which not only wickedly exploits the actual practice of its society but also, by going beyond those limits in an outburst of total wickedness, often makes a disgraceful exhibition of its own ugliness, which had previously been concealed behind the barriers of traditional morality.⁵⁰ Whatever accords with the social practices of those with whom we have to live this present life—whether this manner of life is imposed by necessity or undertaken in the course of duty—should be related by good and serious men to the aims of self-interest and kindness, either literally, as we ourselves should do, or also figuratively, as is allowed to the prophets. 51. When those who are unfamiliar with different social practices come up against such actions in their reading, they think them wicked unless restrained by some explicit authority. They are incapable of realizing that their own sort of behaviour patterns, whether in matters of marriage, or diet, or dress, or any other aspect of human life and culture, would seem wicked to other races or other ages. 52. Some people have been struck by the enormous diversity of social practices and in a state of drowsiness, as I would put it—for they were neither sunk in the deep sleep of stupidity nor capable of staying awake to greet the light of wisdom—have concluded that justice has no absolute existence but that each race views its own practices as just. So since the practices of all races are diverse, whereas justice ought to remain unchangeable, there clearly is no such thing as justice anywhere. To say no more, they have not realized that the injunction ‘do not do to another what you would not wish to be done to yourself’⁵⁶⁰ can in no way be modified by racial differences. 53. When this injunction is related to the love of God, all wickedness dies; and when it is related to the love of one's neighbour, all wrongdoing dies. For nobody wants his own dwelling to be wrecked, and so he should not wish to wreck God's dwelling (which is himself).⁵⁶¹ Nobody wants to be harmed by anybody; so he should not do harm to anybody. 54. So when the tyranny of lust has been overthrown love rules with laws that are utterly just: to love God on his account, and

⁵⁵⁹ Cf. Cic. *In Catilinam* 2. 22 (a favourite speech according to Hagendahl, *Augustine and the Latin Classics*, 2. 482).

⁵⁶⁰ Tobit 4: 16.

⁵⁶¹ The words *se ipsum scilicet* (referring to 1 Cor. 3: 16–17) are perhaps a gloss; the logic and expression of the passage are better without them.

to love oneself and one's neighbour on God's account. Therefore in dealing with figurative expressions we will observe a rule of this kind: the passage being read should be studied with careful consideration until its interpretation can be connected with the realm of love. If this point is made literally, then no kind of figurative expression need be considered.⁵⁵ If the expression is a prescriptive one, and either forbids wickedness or wrongdoing, or enjoins self-interest or kindness, it is not figurative. But if it appears to enjoin wickedness or wrongdoing or to forbid self-interest or kindness, it is figurative. Scripture says, 'Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you will not have life in you'.⁵⁶⁶ This appears to enjoin wickedness or wrongdoing, and so it is figurative, a command to participate in the Lord's passion and to store in our memory the pleasurable and useful knowledge that his flesh was crucified and wounded for our sake. 56. Scripture says, 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink.'⁵⁶⁷ Here no one can doubt that it enjoins kindness. But one would think that the following words 'for by doing this you will pile coals of fire on his head' advocate malicious wrongdoing; so one can be sure that it was meant figuratively. Given that it can be interpreted in two ways, in the sense of causing harm and in the sense of offering something, the principle of love should lead you to the interpretation involving kindness, so that you understand by 'coals of fire' the agonized groans of penitence which cure the pride of a person who regrets having been the enemy of someone who helped him in distress. 57. Similarly, when the Lord says, 'He who loves his own soul shall lose it',⁵⁶⁸ this should not be taken as forbidding self-interest (everyone must seek to preserve his own soul) but as meaning 'lose one's soul' in a figurative sense—that is, to destroy and lose one's current perverse and disordered way of using it, by which one is inclined to what is temporal and prevented from seeking what is eternal. It is written: 'give to the merciful and do not support a sinner.'⁵⁶⁹ The second part of this statement seems to forbid kindness ('do not support a sinner'); so understand 'sinner' figuratively as 'sin', the meaning being 'do not support his sin'.⁵⁸ It often happens that someone who is, or thinks he is, at a higher stage of the spiritual life regards as figurative instructions

⁵⁶⁶ John 6: 54.

⁵⁶⁷ Rom. 12: 20.

⁵⁶⁸ John 12: 25. Augustine clearly takes this as a command, not a statement of fact; for a survey of his 'complementary' and 'antithetical' interpretations of this verse, see Oliver O'Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine* (New Haven, Conn., 1980), 190–1.

⁵⁶⁹ Eccles. 12: 4.

which are given to those at a lower stage. So, for example, a man who has embraced a life of celibacy and castrated himself for the sake of the kingdom of heaven⁵⁷³ might maintain that any instructions given in the sacred books about loving or governing one's wife should be taken not literally but figuratively; or someone who has resolved to keep his own daughter unmarried might try to interpret as figurative the saying 'Marry off your daughter, and you will have done a great deed.'⁵⁷⁴ 59. This too, then, will be one of our rules for interpreting scripture: we must understand that some instructions are given to all people alike, but others to particular classes of people, so that the medicine may confront not only the general pathology of the disease but also the particular weakness of each part of the body. What cannot be raised to a higher level must be healed at its own level.⁶⁰ Likewise we must take care not to regard something in the Old Testament that is not wickedness or wrongdoing by the standards of its own time—even when understood literally and not figuratively—as capable of being transferred to the present time and applied to our own lives. A person will not do this unless lust is in total control and actively seeking the complicity of the very scriptures by which it must be overthrown. Such a wretch does not realize that these things are written down for a useful purpose, to enable men of good conscience to see, for their own spiritual health, that a practice which they reject can have a good application, and that a practice which they embrace can be damnable, if the love shown by its followers (in the first case) or their greed (in the second) is taken into account.⁶¹ For if one man according to the custom of his time could be chaste with many wives, another today can be lustful with a single wife. I approve the man who exploits the fertility of many women for a purpose other than sex more highly than one who enjoys one woman's flesh for its own sake. In one case there is the motive of self-interest, in accordance with the conditions prevailing at the time; in the other, the satisfaction of a lust caught up in the pleasures of the world. In God's eyes the men to whom the apostle allowed sexual intercourse with their individual wives, because of their lack of self-control,⁵⁷⁵ are at a lower stage than those who each had several wives but looked

⁵⁷³ Matt. 19: 12.

⁵⁷⁴ Eccus. 7: 27.

⁵⁷⁵ 1 Cor. 7: 2.

only to the procreation of children in the sexual act (just as in eating and drinking a wise man looks only to physical health). 62. And so if the Lord's advent had found them still in this life, when it was time not 'to throw away stones but collect them'⁵⁷⁹ they would have immediately castrated themselves for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. For there is no difficulty in foregoing sex, except where there is lust in practising it. Those men of old knew that the enjoyment of sex with their wives was a form of unrestrained abuse. This is shown by Tobit's prayer when he married his wife: 'You are blessed, Lord of our fathers, and your name is blessed for ages to come. Let the heavens and all creation bless you. You made Adam and gave him the assistance of Eve. And now, Lord, you know that it is not for enjoyment that I am taking my sister, but in all honesty, so that you may have mercy on us, O Lord.'⁵⁸⁰ 63. But promiscuous people who with unbridled lust go through one affair after another, or people who, just with a single wife, not only exceed the limit appropriate to the procreation of children but also in their inhuman⁵⁸¹ incontinence pile filth upon filth with an utterly shameless exercise of their slavish kind of freedom, do not consider it possible that the men of old treated their many wives with self-control and in so doing simply fulfilled the duty, required by their times, of creating offspring. What they themselves, entangled as they are in the toils of lust, do not even achieve with one wife, they think totally impossible with several.⁶⁴ But they may as well say that good and holy men should not even be honoured or praised, just because they themselves, when honoured and praised, swell with pride, and because the more frequent, and the more widespread, the publicity of flattering tongues becomes, the more greedy they are for empty praise. This makes them vain, and so the wind of rumour, whether it is seen as favourable or unfavourable, draws them into various whirlpools of wickedness or drives them against the rocks of wrongdoing. So they should realize what a difficult and demanding thing it is not to be enticed by the bait of praise or pierced by the barbs of insult, and not measure others by themselves. 65. They would do better to reckon that our apostles were neither puffed up when admired by men nor cast down when despised. They escaped neither of these temptations, being fêted by the accolades of believers and slandered by the

⁵⁷⁹ Cf. Eccles. 3: 5.

⁵⁸⁰ Tobit 8: 7–10.

⁵⁸¹ I have followed the reading *inhumanioris* rather than *humaniores* ; both have manuscript support.

abuse of persecutors. 66. So just as the apostles experienced all this in accordance with the custom of their times without being corrupted, so those men of old, relating their treatment of women to the conventions of their times, did not tolerate the domination of lust, the lust which enslaves men who find all this incredible.⁶⁷ And so if they discovered that their wives or concubines had been accosted or violated by their sons, these men would be quite unable to restrain themselves from implacably hating them, supposing that anything of this kind had happened to them. 68. But King David, when he suffered this at the hands of his wicked and brutal son, not only put up with his cruelty but even lamented his death.⁵⁸⁷ He was not trapped in the net of carnal jealousy, since it was not his own injuries but the sins of his son that worried him. He had in fact deliberately given orders that if his son were overcome he should not be killed, so as to leave him some scope for repentance when overthrown.⁵⁸⁸ After failing to save him he grieved over his son's death not because of his bereavement, but because he knew the penalties to which a soul guilty of such wicked adultery and murder was heading. For on the death of his earlier son (who was innocent), whose illness had been distressing him,⁵⁸⁹ he was pleased. 69. The following episode makes it very clear what moderation and self-control those men showed towards women. The same king, his head turned by youthful passion and worldly success, unlawfully violated a woman after ordering her husband to be killed,⁵⁹⁰ and was accused by the prophet.⁵⁹¹ When he came to David to convict him of his sin, Nathan put to him the analogy of a poor man with one sheep, and a neighbour of the poor man, who, although he himself had several, nevertheless served his poor neighbour's one and only sheep to greet the arrival of a guest. 70. This appalled King David, who ordered the neighbour to be killed and the poor man to be compensated for his sheep four times over—and so condemned himself unawares for the sin he was aware of having committed. When apprised of this and warned of divine punishment he atoned for his sin by repentance. But in this analogy it is only the sexual sin that is signalled by the sheep of the poor neighbour. David was not asked in this analogy about the murder of the woman's husband—the killing

⁵⁸⁷ 2 Kgs. (2 Sam.) 18. 33.

⁵⁸⁸ 2 Kgs. (2 Sam.) 18. 5.

⁵⁸⁹ 2 Kgs. (2 Sam.) 12. 15–23.

⁵⁹⁰ 2 Kgs. (2 Sam.) 11.

⁵⁹¹ 2 Kgs. (2 Sam.) 12: 1–14.

of the poor man himself, that is, with his single sheep—and so it was on his adultery alone that he issued his self-condemnatory verdict. 71. One can infer from this the self-control with which he treated his many women, since in the case of the one woman with whom he had overstepped the limit he was compelled to punish himself. But in David's case there was no permanence to this extravagant lust, it was a passing phase; that is why his illicit appetite was called a 'guest' by the prophet who convicted him. He did not say that the man had offered his poor neighbour's sheep in a feast for his king, but for his guest. 72. But in David's son Solomon this lust was no guest paying a passing visit, but took over the whole kingdom. Scripture did not remain silent about this, but condemned him as a womanizer.⁵⁹⁶ In his early life he had a passionate desire for wisdom; but then, after gaining it through spiritual love, he lost it through carnal love.⁷³ So all, or nearly all, of the deeds contained in the books of the Old Testament are to be interpreted not only literally but also figuratively; but (in the case of those which the reader interprets literally) if agents are praised but their actions do not agree with the practices of the good men who since the Lord's coming in the flesh have been the guardians of the divine precepts, one should take up the figurative meaning into the understanding⁵⁹⁷ but not take over the deed itself into one's own behaviour. Many things were done in those times out of duty which cannot be done now except out of lust. 74. But when reading about the sins of great men, even if it is possible to observe or trace a prefiguration of future events in them, one should nevertheless take on board the literal meaning of the act, in this way. Bearing in mind the dangerous storms and miserable shipwrecks suffered by great men one should refrain from boasting of one's own deeds, which would be quite wrong, or despising others as sinners by the standards of one's own justice. 75. Even the sins of these men have been recorded in order to put people everywhere in awe of the apostle's saying 'So whoever thinks he stands must take care not to fall.'⁵⁹⁸ There is hardly a page in the Bible which does not proclaim the message: 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'⁵⁹⁹ 76. The greatest care must therefore be taken to determine

⁵⁹⁶ 3 Kgs. (1 Kgs.) 11: 1–4.

⁵⁹⁷ A difficult passage: after stating (as in 2.48) that many passages may be taken both literally and figuratively he focuses on things taken literally but then seems to contradict himself in the words *figuram ad intellegentiam referat*. Schäublin deleted *figuram*, but this weakens the antithesis.

⁵⁹⁸ 1 Cor. 10: 12.

⁵⁹⁹ Jas. 4: 6.

whether the expression that we are trying to understand is literal or figurative. When we have worked out that it is figurative, it is easy to study it from various angles, using the rules set out in Book 1, until we reach the true meaning, especially if we have the advantage of experience fortified by the exercise of holiness. We find out if an expression is literal or figurative by considering the criteria mentioned above.⁷⁷ Once this becomes clear, the words in which it is expressed will be found to be taken either from things that are similar or things that are in some way connected.⁷⁸ But since there are many ways in which things may resemble other things, we should not imagine that there is a hard and fast rule that a word will always have the meaning that it has in a particular place. The Lord used the word 'leaven' in a pejorative sense when he said 'Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees',⁶⁰⁹ but in a commendatory sense when he said 'The kingdom of heaven is like a woman who hid leaven in three measures of wheat until it was all leavened.'⁶¹⁰79. Examination of these differences reveals two forms. The various meanings of a particular thing may be either contrary or just different. By contrary I mean cases in which a particular thing is used sometimes in a good sense and sometimes in a bad one, like the leaven just discussed. Another example is 'lion', which signifies Christ in the passage 'The lion from the tribe of Juda has conquered',⁶¹¹ but 'devil' in the passage 'Your enemy the devil walks round like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.'⁶¹² 80. And 'serpent' is used in a good sense in the passage 'be wise as serpents',⁶¹³ but in a bad sense in 'the serpent seduced Eve by its cunning'.⁶¹⁴ 'Bread' in a good sense: 'I am the living bread come from heaven';⁶¹⁵ in a bad sense: 'gladly eat hidden bread'.⁶¹⁶ And so on. The examples cited are quite uncontroversial in meaning, since only perfectly plain passages should be cited as examples. But there are some which are uncertain, such as 'There is a cup of wine in the hand of the Lord, full of mixed wine.'⁶¹⁷ 81. It is not clear whether this signifies the wrath of God, not carried as far as the ultimate penalty (that is, down to the dregs), or the gracious gift of the scriptures which passes from Jews to Gentiles (because 'it inclined from the one to the other'), but in such a way that the practices redolent of the flesh remain with the Jews ('because

⁶⁰⁹ Matt. 16: 6, 11.

⁶¹⁰ Luke 13: 21. It was here that Augustine broke off: see Introduction, pp. xi–xiii.

⁶¹¹ Rev. 5: 5.

⁶¹² 1 Pet. 5: 8.

⁶¹³ Matt. 10: 16. I have added *estote*, which could easily be lost before the similar sounding *astuti*.

⁶¹⁴ 2 Cor. 11: 3.

⁶¹⁵ John 6: 51.

⁶¹⁶ Prov. 9: 17.

⁶¹⁷ Ps. 74: 9 (75. 8).

its dregs are not emptied'). A thing may be used not with a contrary significance, but just with a different one; an example is 'water', which signifies both people, as in Revelation,⁶²⁵ and the Holy Spirit, as in 'rivers of running water will flow from his belly',⁶²⁶ as well as various other things, depending on the context.⁸² There are other things too which signify not just single ideas⁶²⁷ but, taken individually, two or often more ideas, depending on the contexts in which they are found. ⁸³ From passages where such things are expressed clearly one should find out how they are to be understood in obscure contexts. There is no better way of understanding what was said to the Lord in the words, 'Take your arms and shield and rise to help me'⁶²⁸ than by using the passage 'Lord, you have crowned us as with the shield of your good will.'⁶²⁹ Not that we should understand only the meaning 'God's good will' in every passage where we read of the shield being used as a defence; there is also 'the shield of faith, with which you may extinguish all the arrows of the evil one'.⁶³⁰ Nor again should we necessarily assign the meaning 'faith' just to the shield alone among such spiritual armour; in another passage the breastplate of faith is also mentioned: 'Put on the breastplate of faith and love.'⁶³¹⁸⁴ Sometimes not just one meaning but two or more meanings are perceived in the same words of scripture. Even if the writer's meaning is obscure, there is no danger here, provided that it can be shown from other passages of the holy scriptures that each of these interpretations is consistent with the truth. The person examining the divine utterances must of course do his best to arrive at the intention of the writer through whom the Holy Spirit produced that part of scripture; he may reach that meaning or carve out from the words another meaning which does not run counter to the faith, using the evidence of any other passage of the divine utterances. ⁸⁵ Perhaps the author too saw that very meaning in the words which we are trying to understand. Certainly the spirit of God who worked through the author foresaw without any doubt that it would present itself to a reader or listener, or rather planned that it should present itself, because it too is based on the truth. Could God have built into the divine eloquence a more generous or bountiful gift than the possibility of understanding the same

⁶²⁵ Rev. 17: 15.

⁶²⁶ John 7: 38.

⁶²⁷ The transmitted text has *singulae*, but it seems pointless to say that examples of things that have a multiplicity of meanings are not singular.

⁶²⁸ Ps. 34: 2 (35: 2).

⁶²⁹ Ps. 5: 13 (5: 12).

⁶³⁰ Eph. 6: 16.

⁶³¹ 1 Thess. 5: 8.

words in several ways, all of them deriving confirmation from other no less divinely inspired passages.⁶³⁸ 86. When one unearths an equivocal meaning which cannot be verified by unequivocal support from the holy scriptures it remains for the meaning to be brought into the open by a process of reasoning, even if the writer whose words we are seeking to understand perhaps did not perceive it. But this practice is dangerous; it is much safer to operate within the divine scriptures. When we wish to examine passages obscured by metaphorical expressions, the result should be something which is beyond dispute or which, if not beyond dispute, can be settled by finding and deploying corroboratory evidence from within scripture itself.⁸⁷ The literary-minded should be aware that our Christian authors used all the figures of speech which teachers of grammar call by their Greek name of tropes, and that they did so more diversely and profusely than can be judged or imagined by those who are unfamiliar with scripture or who gained their knowledge of figures from other literature.⁶³⁹ Those who know about these tropes recognize them in sacred literature, and this knowledge to some extent helps them in understanding it. This would not be the proper place to present them to people not familiar with them; I do not wish to look as if I am giving a course on grammar. I recommend that they be learnt independently; as indeed I have recommended already, in Book 2, when discussing the importance of learning languages.⁶⁴⁰ 88. (Letters, from which grammar actually takes its name—the Greek word for them is *grammata*—are of course the signs of the sounds involved in the articulation of the words which we use when speaking.) In the divine books we find not only examples of these tropes, as of everything else, but also the names of some of them, like ‘allegory’, ‘enigma’, and ‘parable’.⁶⁴¹ Almost all these tropes, which are said to be acquired through one of the ‘liberal’ arts, are also found in the utterances of those who have had no formal teaching in grammar and are content with the style of ordinary people. 89. Don't we all say ‘so may you flourish’? This is a metaphor. Don't we all refer to a swimming pool by the word *piscina*, which takes its name from fish even though it does not contain fish and was not made for fish?⁶⁴² This trope is called catachresis.⁶⁴³90. It would take a long time to work through the others in

⁶³⁸ This matter is more fully dealt with in the second half of *Conf.* 12.

⁶³⁹ Cf. 2. 50.

⁶⁴⁰ Cf. 2. 43.

⁶⁴¹ Cf. Gal. 4: 24; 1 Cor. 13: 12; ‘parable’ is much commoner.

⁶⁴² A stock example among ancient grammarians.

⁶⁴³ *Catachresis* (Latin also *abusio*) denotes the use of a word in a context where strictly speaking it does not apply (e.g. ‘substantial’ for ‘big’, or ‘menu’ or ‘mouse’ in computer language).

the same way. Popular speech has even come to use some which are remarkable because what they mean is the opposite of what is said, like the figures of irony and antiphrasis. In irony we indicate what is meant by means of our intonation, as when we say to a man who is doing something badly, 'you're doing a good job there'. In antiphrasis, on the other hand, we signify the opposite meaning, not by our intonation, but either by the use of particular words whose origin derives from a contrary—for example, *lucus* ('grove'), which is so called because it has little light,⁶⁵⁰ or by using certain customary expressions (though these can also be used without a contrary meaning). For example, when looking for something that is not available in a particular place, we may be told 'there's plenty';⁶⁵¹ or we may by adding words give what we say a contrary interpretation, as in 'beware of him, he's a good man'.⁶⁵² 91. Are things of this kind not said by all the uneducated⁶⁵³ and by people who are totally ignorant of the tropes and all their names? A knowledge of them is necessary for the resolution of ambiguities in scripture because when a meaning based on the literal interpretation of the words is absurd we must investigate whether the passage that we cannot understand is perhaps being expressed by means of one or other of the tropes. This is how most hidden meanings have been discovered.⁹² A certain Tyconius,⁶⁵⁴ who although a Donatist himself wrote against the Donatists with irresistible power—and thereby stands convicted of having a split personality since he was unwilling to make a clean break with them—wrote a book which he called 'The Book of Rules', because in it he developed seven rules which could be used like keys to open up the secrets of the divine scriptures.⁶⁵⁵ 93. The first rule is 'On the Lord and his body'; the second 'On the Lord's twofold body'; the third 'On the promises and the law'; the fourth 'On species and genus'; the fifth 'On measurements of time', the sixth 'On recapitulation'; the seventh 'On the devil and his body'. Consideration of these rules, as expounded by him, is quite helpful in penetrating the obscure parts of the divine writings. Of course not everything that is written in a way that makes it difficult to understand can be clarified by these rules; there are

⁶⁵⁰ Another old chestnut.

⁶⁵¹ Compare perhaps the modern 'no problem' or 'I'm delighted' (in some contexts).

⁶⁵² It is not clear whether Augustine means that the meaning of 'beware' is coloured by 'good' and so means 'look out for', or the reverse (so that 'good' means 'bad'), which would be more truly a contrary interpretation.

⁶⁵³ Cf. Quint. 8. 6. 4.

⁶⁵⁴ On Tyconius see H. Chadwick, 'Tyconius and Augustine' in *Heresy and Orthodoxy in the Early Church* (Variorum, 1991), 49–55, and in general, P. Monceaux, *Histoire littéraire de l'Afrique chrétienne* (Paris, 1920), v. 165–219, esp. 178–195.

⁶⁵⁵ See F. C. Burkitt, *The Book of Rules of Tyconius* (Cambridge, 1894), and the translation of W. S. Babcock, *Tyconius, The Book of Rules* (Atlanta, 1989).

numerous other methods not included in his seven, and indeed Tyconius himself explains many problems without applying any of these rules, because they are not needed. 94. Sometimes there is no relevant matter or problem in the passage under investigation; as, for example, when in Revelation⁶⁵⁸ he discusses how to interpret the angels of the seven churches to which John was ordered to write. There he argues in many different ways and reaches the conclusion that we should interpret the angels as the churches. In that very full discussion there is no sign of these rules, and yet the problem is certainly a very abstruse one. But enough of examples: it would take too much time and effort to assemble all the abstruse passages in scripture where recourse to these seven rules is unnecessary.⁹⁵ When Tyconius was presenting these so-called rules he claimed for them the power to make intelligible almost all the abstruse passages that we find in the law (that is, the divine books), if they are properly learnt and applied. He began his book by saying ‘I have thought it particularly necessary—and more pressing than anything else—to write a book of rules and as it were to fashion some keys, or spotlights, to reveal the secrets of the law. There are certain mystical rules which govern the secret passages of the entire law and make the treasures of the truth invisible to some people. If the principle of these rules is accepted in the ungrudging spirit with which I offer them, all closed doors will swing open and all obscurity be as light as day, so that the reader who roams through the vast forest of prophecy will be guided by these rules as by so many illuminated pathways, and be preserved from error.’⁶⁵⁹ 96. Had he said here, ‘There are certain mystical rules which govern some secret passages of the law’, or even ‘which govern some important secret passages of the law’, and not ‘the secret passages of the whole law’, and had he not said, ‘all closed doors will swing open’ but ‘many closed doors will swing open’, he would have been telling the truth without raising false hopes in his readers and disciples by attributing to his careful and useful work more than the facts warranted. 97. I thought that this needed saying so that students would actually read the book itself—it is very helpful for understanding the scriptures—but not expect from it more than it had to offer. It must certainly be read with caution, not only because of certain

⁶⁵⁸ Rev. 1: 20. On Tyconius' commentary on Revelation, see M. Dulacy, 'La sixième règle de Tyconius et son résumé dans le *De Doctrina Christiana*', *REA* 35 (1989), 83–103.

⁶⁵⁹ This is Tyconius' preface.

things which, being human, he gets wrong, but especially because of the things which he says as a Donatist heretic. I will now briefly explain the teaching and advice that these seven rules have to offer.⁶⁶⁶98. The first one is 'On the Lord and his body'. Sometimes we know that a single being, consisting of a head and a body, that is, Christ and his church, is being presented to us; for it was said to the faithful, not without reason, 'so you are the seed of Abraham',⁶⁶⁷ although there is but a single seed of Abraham, namely Christ. In such cases we should not be puzzled when scripture moves from head to body or vice versa, while still dealing with one and the same person. 99. For it is a single person that says, 'He has placed a garland on me as on a husband and has arrayed me with ornament like a wife',⁶⁶⁸ but it is of course necessary to appreciate which of these two statements applies to the head (Christ), and which to the body (the church). 100. The second rule is 'On the Lord's twofold body', but he should not have given it this title, since something that will not be with God for ever is not in fact the Lord's body. He should rather have said 'On the Lord's true and mixed body', or 'true and apparent body', or perhaps something else, because false Christians should not be said to be with God even at the present time, let alone for eternity, although they appear to be within his church. So that rule could also have been entitled 'On the mixed church'. 101. This rule demands close concentration from the student, since scripture, though actually speaking to another set of people, may seem to be speaking to the actual persons it was addressing before, or may seem to be speaking about the same persons when in fact it is speaking about others, as if both kinds formed a single body by virtue of their temporary unity and their participation in the sacraments. A sentence in the Song of Songs is relevant here: 'I am dark and pretty like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon.'⁶⁶⁹ She does not say, 'I was dark like the tents of Kedar and I am pretty like the curtains of Solomon', but instead says that she is both, because of the temporal unity of good and bad fish inside the single net.⁶⁷⁰ The tents of Kedar refer to Ishmael, who will not be the heir with the free woman's son.⁶⁷¹ 102. And so although God says about the good part, 'I shall

⁶⁶⁶ As a rule Augustine takes one or two of Tyconius' shorter examples.

⁶⁶⁷ Gal. 3: 29.

⁶⁶⁸ Isa. 61: 10.

⁶⁶⁹ S. of S. 1: 4.

⁶⁷⁰ Cf. Matt. 13: 47–8.

⁶⁷¹ Cf. Gen. 21: 10, and Gal. 4: 30.

lead the blind along a way unknown to them, and they will tread paths unknown to them; and I shall make darkness into light for them and crooked ways into straight ones. I shall perform what I say and will not desert them', he says shortly afterwards of the other part, the bad part mixed in with them, 'but they themselves have turned back', although other people are meant by these words.⁶⁷⁹ Because they are now together, he seems to be speaking of those about whom he was speaking before; but they will not always be together. In fact they are like the slave mentioned in the gospel, whose master will when he arrives set him apart and place his lot with the false Christians.⁶⁸⁰103. The third rule is 'On the promises and the law', though an alternative title might be 'On the spirit and the letter', as I myself called it when writing on this subject.⁶⁸¹ It could also be called 'On grace and commandment'. But this seems to me an important problem in itself, rather than a rule to be applied to solving problems. This is the issue that the Pelagians failed to understand when creating, or developing, their heresy. In his discussion of this Tyconius worked on it effectively, but not exhaustively. 104. For when discussing faith and works he said that works were given to us by God according to the merit of our faith, but that faith itself came from within us without coming to us from God. He did not heed the apostle's words: 'peace to the brethren and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ'.⁶⁸² Tyconius had no experience of the heresy which sprang up in our time and was a great trial to me as I championed the grace of God which comes through the Lord Jesus Christ; a heresy which, in accordance with the apostle's words 'it is right that there be heresies, so that the genuine among you may be recognized'⁶⁸³ made me more alert and careful, with the result that I noticed in the holy scripture something that had escaped Tyconius, who was less attentive and less on his guard because he had no opponent: namely that even faith itself is a gift of God, who distributes to each individual his or her measure.⁶⁸⁴ 105. In accordance with this truth it was said to certain people 'a privilege has been given to you for the sake of Christ: that you should not only believe in him, but also suffer for him'.⁶⁸⁵ Who can doubt that both things are the gift of God, on hearing—with faith and understanding

⁶⁷⁹ Isa. 42: 16–17.

⁶⁸⁰ Matt. 24: 50–1.

⁶⁸¹ Augustine's work of this title was written in 412.

⁶⁸² Eph. 6: 23.

⁶⁸³ 1 Cor. 11: 19.

⁶⁸⁴ Rom. 12: 3.

⁶⁸⁵ Phil. 1: 29.

—that both have been given? There are many other testimonies that demonstrate this, but that is not my present purpose. I have, however, dealt with them very often in various other places. 106. The fourth of Tyconius' rules is 'on species and genus'. That is his title; by 'species' he means a part, by 'genus' the whole to which the part which he calls the species belongs. So since each individual state is part of the whole of the world's population, he calls this the species, and the whole population the genus. We need not here apply the subtle distinctions taught by the logicians, who argue very finely about the difference between part and species. 107. The same principle applies to anything of this nature found in the divine writings which concerns not a single state, but a single province or nation or kingdom. For example: not only are statements made in the holy scriptures about Jerusalem or about gentile states such as Tyre, Babylon, or whatever, which transcend the limits of the particular state and are more suitable to all races, but statements are also made about Judaea, Egypt, Assyria, and other nations in which there are several states but which do not comprise the whole world but only a part of it, which transcend the limits of the particular nation and are more suitable to the whole world of which that is a part or, in his terms, to the genus of which it is a species. 108. In this sense these words have entered the popular domain: even laymen can understand what is of general or specific import in an imperial edict. The rule applies to persons, too: witness the things said about Solomon, which transcend the limits of their subject and in fact really become clear only when related to Christ or the church, of which Solomon is a part. 109. The species is not always transcended: often statements are made which are quite clearly appropriate either to the species as well as the genus or perhaps exclusively to the species. But when scripture moves from species to genus while apparently still speaking of the species, the reader's attention must be particularly close, so as not to seek in the species a meaning which can be found more easily and convincingly in the genus. 110. It is easy to understand what the prophet Ezekiel says: 'The house of Israel lived in the land and they profaned it by their ways and their idols and their sins; their conduct before my face was like the uncleanness of a menstruating woman. And I poured out my anger upon them and

dispersed them among the peoples and scattered them among all regions; I judged them according to their ways and according to their sins.⁶⁹⁴ It is easy, I say, to understand this of the house of Israel, about which Paul says, ‘see Israel according to the flesh’⁶⁹⁵ because the people of Israel did or experienced all these things in the flesh. 111. Other things in what follows can also be understood of that people. But when he goes on to say, ‘And I will sanctify my name, that great name which is profaned among the nations, which you profaned in the midst of them; and the nations will know that I am the Lord’⁶⁹⁶ the reader must now carefully observe how the species is transcended and the genus introduced. The passage continues: ‘When I am sanctified through you before their eyes, I will take you from the peoples and gather you from all lands and bring you into your own land. And I will sprinkle you with clean water, and you will be made clean from all your idolatries. I will cleanse you and give you a new heart, and I will give you a new spirit. And I will take away from your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh; and I will give my spirit to you and cause you to walk in my ordinances and keep and observe my judgements. And you will live in the land which I gave to your fathers, and you will be my people and I will be your God. And I will cleanse you from all your uncleanness.’⁶⁹⁷ 112. That this is a prophecy about the New Testament, involving not only that particular race in its remnants (about which it is written elsewhere, ‘Even if the number of the sons of Israel is as the sand of the seashore, only a remnant will be safe’)⁶⁹⁸ but also all the other races promised to their fathers, who are also our fathers, will be unambiguously clear to anyone who has the insight to see that here is a promise of the baptism of regeneration⁶⁹⁹ which we now see duly given to all peoples. He will also realize and recognize that the words used by Paul the apostle to commend the grace of the New Testament so that it stood out in comparison with the Old Testament—‘You are our letter, written not with ink but with the spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on the fleshly tablets of the heart’⁷⁰⁰—derive from this passage, where the prophet says, ‘And I will give you a new heart and a new spirit, and I will take away from your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.’⁷⁰¹ 113. He wanted the heart of flesh—

⁶⁹⁴ Ezek. 36: 17–19.

⁶⁹⁵ 1 Cor. 10: 18.

⁶⁹⁶ Ezek. 36: 23.

⁶⁹⁷ Ezek. 36: 23–9.

⁶⁹⁸ Isa. 10: 22; cf. Rom. 9: 27.

⁶⁹⁹ Titus 3: 5.

⁷⁰⁰ 2 Cor. 3: 2–3.

⁷⁰¹ Ezek. 36: 26.

whence the apostle's expression 'in the fleshy tablets of the heart'—to be distinguished from the heart of stone because of its sentient life; and by sentient life he meant intelligent life. So 'spiritual Israel' becomes not a matter of a single race, but of all the races promised to the fathers in their seed, which is Christ.⁷⁰⁹114. This spiritual Israel is distinguished from the fleshy Israel, consisting of a single people, by the novelty of grace, not by nobility of race, and by mentality, not nationality. But such is the prophet's profundity that while speaking about the former and indeed to the former he moves imperceptibly to the latter; and while speaking about the latter or addressing himself to the latter he still seems to be speaking about the former and addressing himself to the former, not with the hostile purpose of begrudging us an understanding of the scriptures but with the healthy one of stretching our understanding. 115. So when he says 'I will bring you into your own land',⁷¹⁰ and a little later repeats it, 'And you will live in the land which I gave to your fathers',⁷¹¹ we should understand this not carnally, of the fleshy Israel, but spiritually, of the spiritual Israel. It is the church 'without blemish or wrinkle',⁷¹² assembled from all peoples and destined to reign with Christ, which is itself the land of the blessed, the 'land of the living'.⁷¹³ And it is the church itself that should be understood as having been given to the fathers at the time when it was promised by God's sure and immutable will, since what our fathers believed would be given in its own time was already given with the security of promise or predestination. Similarly, when writing to Timothy of the grace given to the saints, Paul says 'Not according to our works, but according to his purpose and his grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the eternal ages but has now been made plain by our saviour's coming.'⁷¹⁴ 116. He said that grace was given at a time when there were not even people to whom it could be given, because in God's disposition and foreknowledge what was going to happen in its own time had already happened; this he describes by the words 'made plain'. However, this could also be understood to mean the land of a future generation, since there will be 'a new heaven and a new earth',⁷¹⁵ in which the unjust will not be able to live. Therefore it is said to the saints

⁷⁰⁹ Gal. 3: 16.

⁷¹⁰ Ezek. 36: 24.

⁷¹¹ Ezek. 36: 28.

⁷¹² Eph. 5: 27.

⁷¹³ Ps. 26: 13 (27: 13).

⁷¹⁴ 2 Tim. 1: 9–10.

⁷¹⁵ Rev. 21: 1.

quite correctly that the land itself, which will not in any way belong to the wicked, is theirs; because, in the same way, the land was actually given at the time when the gift was ratified.⁷²¹ 117. The fifth rule laid down by Tyconius is the one that he calls ‘On measurements of time’, by which one can often discover or figure out indications of time in the holy scriptures that are not explicit. He says that this rule works in two ways, either through the trope of synecdoche or through ordinary numbers. The trope synecdoche permits either the whole to be understood from the part, or the part from the whole. By way of example, one evangelist says that an event happened eight days later and another puts it six days later—this being the occasion when on the mountain with only three disciples present the Lord's face shone like the sun and his clothes like snow.⁷²¹ 118. These statements about the number of days could not both be correct unless the writer who said ‘eight days later’ is understood as having treated the last part of the day on which Christ predicted that the event would happen and the first part of the day on which he demonstrated its fulfilment as two whole days, and the writer who said ‘after six days’ as having counted six whole days, but only the intervening ones. This figure of speech, by which the whole is signified by a part, also provides a solution to the problem about Christ's resurrection. 119. For unless the last part of the day on which he suffered is taken as one whole day (by adding the previous night) and the night at the end of which he rose again as another whole day (by adding the Sunday that was just dawning), you cannot get the three days and nights which he predicted that he would spend in the heart of the earth.⁷²² 120. By ordinary numbers he means those which scripture makes conspicuous use of, like the numbers seven or ten or twelve, and the others which scholars happily acknowledge as they read. As a rule such numbers are made to stand for a complete period of time; so ‘I will praise you seven times a day’⁷²³ means exactly the same as ‘his praise shall always be on my lips’.⁷²⁴ 121. They have the same meaning when multiplied, whether by ten, giving seventy or seven hundred—hence the seventy years of Jeremiah⁷²⁵ may be understood spiritually as the whole of the time during which the church is among foreigners—or by themselves; so ten times ten is a hundred, and twelve times

⁷²¹ Matt. 17: 1–2 (six); Mark 9: 1–2 (six); Luke 9: 28 (eight). The same explanation is given by Augustine in *De Consensu Evangelistarum* 2. 56. 113, 3. 24. 66.

⁷²² Matt. 12: 40.

⁷²³ Ps. 118: 164 (119: 164).

⁷²⁴ Ps. 33: 2 (34: 1).

⁷²⁵ Jer. 25: 11, 29: 10.

twelve is one hundred and forty four, a number which in Revelation signifies the whole body of saints.⁷³¹ So it is clear not only that these numbers are the key to chronological problems, but also that their significance is wider and their influence far-reaching. For in Revelation the number I mentioned relates not to time, but people.¹²² Tyconius gives the name ‘recapitulation’ to his sixth rule, a rule discovered by close attention to the obscurities of scripture.⁷³² Some passages are presented as if their contents follow in chronological order or in a continuous sequence, when in fact the narrative covertly switches back to earlier matters which had been passed over. Failure to recognize the operation of this rule leads to misunderstandings. ¹²³ It is said in Genesis: “The Lord God planted a garden in Eden to the East and placed there the man that he had made, and God also produced from the earth every tree that is beautiful to look at and good to eat.”⁷³³ This gives the impression that the last action was done after he had made man and placed him in the garden, when in fact, having briefly mentioned both things—that God planted the garden and placed there the man that he had made—the writer recapitulates and goes back to say what he had passed over, namely how the garden was planted, that ‘God also produced from the earth every tree that is beautiful to look at and good to eat’. ¹²⁴ Finally, following this up, he added ‘and the tree of life in the middle of paradise and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil’. Then comes the river for the irrigation of the garden, divided into the four sources of the four rivers:⁷³⁴ all this concerns the making of the garden. After finishing that description, the writer repeated what he had already said—and this really followed on at this point—in the words, ‘and the Lord took the man that he had made and placed him in the garden’,⁷³⁵ and so on. ¹²⁵ For it was after these actions that the man was placed there, as is now showed by the new order, and not the reverse, as its prior position in the narrative might lead one to think unless one was alert enough to recognize a recapitulation there, and a return to what had been passed over.¹²⁶ Similarly in the same book, where the generations of the sons of Noah are recorded, it was said: ‘these are the sons of Ham by their tribes, according to their tongues, by their

⁷³¹ Rev. 7: 4.

⁷³² In ‘La sixième règle de Tyconius’, M. Dulacy compares Augustine's interpretation of the sixth rule with the extant text and argues that Augustine is also indebted to his commentary on Revelation (cf. n. 85 above).

⁷³³ Gen. 2: 8–9.

⁷³⁴ Gen. 2: 9.

⁷³⁵ Gen. 2: 15.

regions, and by their races.' After the enumeration of the sons of Sem, it is said: 'these are the sons of Sem by their tribes, according to their tongues, by their regions, and by their races.' And then, referring to them all, the writer adds 'These are the tribes of the sons of Noah, according to their generations and their races. From these tribes the various pockets of Gentiles were scattered over the earth after the flood. And every land had a single language, and all had one voice.'⁷³⁹ 127. This last addition 'And every land had a single language, and all had one voice' (that is, one common language) gives the impression that there was a single common language at the time when they had been dispersed over the land in pockets of Gentiles. This is clearly inconsistent with the previous words 'by their tribes and according to their languages'. Single tribes which had formed single races cannot be said to have had their own languages at a time when there was a single language common to all. 128. Therefore the words 'and every land had a single language, and all had one voice' are added by recapitulation, with the narrative covertly turning back on itself, in order to explain how it happened that after having a single common language they were divided among many. Immediately after this comes the story of the building of the tower; this was when the penalty for their arrogance was imposed on them by divine judgement. It was after this that they were scattered throughout the world according to their various languages.⁷⁴⁰129. This recapitulation may take an even more obscure form, as in the gospel where the Lord says, 'on the day that Lot left Sodom it rained fire from heaven and destroyed everyone: such will be the days of the Son of Man, when he is revealed. At that hour, if someone is on his roof and his goods in the house, he should not return to take them; and someone in the field likewise should not turn back. Remember Lot's wife.'⁷⁴¹ Surely it is not at the time when the Lord is revealed that this advice is to be followed (not to look back, or, in other words, not to inquire into the past life which one has renounced), but rather at the present time, so that when the Lord is revealed one may find compensation for the things that one has maintained or abandoned. 130. But because of the words 'at that hour' it looks as if this advice is to be followed at the time when the Lord is revealed, unless the reader's senses are alert to the recapitulation. Help comes from another part of scripture,

⁷³⁹ Gen. 10: 20; 10: 31; 10: 32; 11: 1.

⁷⁴⁰ Gen. 11: 4–9.

⁷⁴¹ Luke 17: 29–32.

which proclaimed in the time of the apostles themselves ‘Sons, it is the last hour.’⁷⁴⁹ So it is the time in which the gospel is being preached, the time leading up to the revelation of the Lord, that is the hour at which that advice ought to be followed, because the actual revelation of the Lord relates to the time which will end with the day of judgement.¹³¹ The seventh and last rule of Tyconius is ‘On the devil and his body’. He is actually himself the head of the wicked, and they are, in a way, his body, destined to go with him into the punishment of eternal fire,⁷⁵⁰ just as Christ is the head of the church,⁷⁵¹ and the church is his body, destined to be with him in his kingdom in eternal glory. Just as the first rule (‘On the Lord and his body’) should make us alert, when scripture is speaking of one and the same person, to distinguish what applies to the head and what applies to the body, so here with the last: sometimes something is said against the devil which cannot be understood of him but rather concerns his body—a body which comprises not only those who are quite clearly outside,⁷⁵² but also those who although they belong to him are nevertheless part of the church for the time being, until each individual departs this life and is separated out like chaff from wheat at the last judgement.⁷⁵³ 132. The words of Isaiah, ‘how Lucifer, son of the dawn, has fallen from the sky’⁷⁵⁴ and the rest, which are spoken about, or to, one and the same person under the guise of the King of Babylon, are certainly in the actual context understood of the devil. But the following words ‘he who sends to all races is pounded into the earth’ do not entirely apply to the head itself. It is true that the devil sends his angels to all races, yet it is the devil's body, not the devil himself, that is pounded into the earth, except in the sense that he is in his own body, which when pounded becomes dust for the wind to drive from the face of the earth.⁷⁵⁵ 133. All these rules, with the single exception of the one entitled ‘On promises and law’, state that one thing is to be understood by another. This is the characteristic of metaphorical diction, which is too broad a category, it seems to me, to be embraced in its entirety by a single person. Whenever one thing is said in order that something else may be understood, we have a metaphorical expression, even if the name of the actual trope is not found in the textbooks. When this takes a

⁷⁴⁹ 1 John 2: 18.

⁷⁵⁰ Matt. 25: 41.

⁷⁵¹ Eph. 1: 22–3.

⁷⁵² 1 Cor. 5: 12.

⁷⁵³ Matt. 3: 12; Luke 3: 17.

⁷⁵⁴ Isa. 14: 12.

⁷⁵⁵ Ps. 1: 4.

familiar form, understanding follows without effort; when it does not, effort is needed for understanding, and more in some cases than others, depending on the gifts of God bestowed on our human intellects or the assistance that he gives. 134. As in the case of the literal usages that I discussed earlier, when things are to be understood in their plain sense, so too in metaphorical ones, expressed through tropes, when one thing must be understood by another—which I have now dealt with at what seems appropriate length—students of our revered scriptures must be taught to recognize the various kinds of expression in holy scripture, to notice and memorize the ways in which it tends to say things, and especially—this is paramount, and absolutely vital—to pray for understanding. In the literature which they study they read that ‘God gives wisdom, and from his face there is knowledge and understanding’,⁷⁵⁷ and from him too they have also received their actual commitment to study, provided that it is accompanied by holiness.

135. But enough about signs, at least in their relation to words. It remains to present, in my next book, whatever the Lord prompts me to say on the subject of presenting our thoughts to others.

⁷⁵⁷ Prov. 2: 6.