Notes on *Confessions*, Installment 3

Book III

1. I went to Carthage, where I found myself in a hissing cauldron of lust. I was in love with love, and wished to enjoy the body of whomever I loved. I did not feel the need for the food that does not perish. You punished me with the lashes of jealousy, suspicion, fear, anger quarrels.

2. I loved the theater. Why do we love the misery of those who suffer in theater? Where the fingers scratch, the skin becomes inflamed. (This seems to reflect Socrates’ attitude in the *Republic*. As Augustine expresses it here, I don’t understand it. Is it the sensuousness of the theatre or the vicarious sorrow that he is condemning?)

3. I was studying law. I was puffed up with conceit, but not as bad as the “Wreckers,” who performed cruel pranks on newcomers.

4. I was inflamed to seek wisdom by reading Cicero’s *Hortensius*, and thus inflamed to seek You. [Note: the *Hortensius* is now lost, except in fragments.]

5. I read the Scriptures, but to me they did not match up to Cicero.

6. I fell in with the Manichees, sensualists who dressed ridiculous fantasies in the trappings of Christianity. You are higher than Your creation, and even more so than the imaginings of the Manichees, which I took to be the world of nature. The five dens of darkness. Even the fables of the poets were better than these. My mistake was that I sought You through the senses, not the mind.

7. Their arguments:
   a. What is evil? I did not know that it is the removal of good
   b. How can God be a bodily shape? I did not know that God is spirit
   c. How can good men be polygamous and sacrifice animals? I did not know that God apportions his commandments to time and place

8. All crime and sin is
   a. Acts against nature (I presume he means homosexuality)
   b. Violence
   c. Disobedience of God

9. The moral value of one’s acts may not be as it appears to men

10. Description of Manichee rites. The initiates became purified by feeding the elect.

11. Monica’s dream of the ruler.

12. You also answered her prayer in a bishop’s refusing her desire that he instruct me. He said, “It cannot be that the son of these tears should be lost.” She took it as a sign I would eventually be saved.

Book IV

1. During these years I was self-indulgent, desirous of meaningless honors, and seeking to be purified by the Manichee rites.

2. I taught public speaking, lived faithfully with a woman not my wife, and refused the services of a magician.
3. I sought the advice of astrologers, until a fatherly doctor convinced me that their theories were wrong. (I liked them because, like the Manichees, their theories implied that my sins were from outside me.) Some of the time they were right, but this was only by chance.

4. I had a very dear friend that died, and thus was a great sorrow.

5. Why is there sweetness in tears? You are steadfast, but we are storm-tossed.

6. I was tired of living and afraid to die.

7. I moved back to Carthage.

8. And was eventually brought out of my grief by companionship.

9. What we cherish in friendship is friendship (? Is this what he's saying?)

10. Only those who love You and love those they love in you and their enemies for Your sake do not lose them.

11. Make your dwelling in God, my soul.

12. Cling to God. A brief account of the work of Christ, as Augustine interprets it—He united His nature to ours, so that ours might become immortal.

13. I was in love with beauty of a lower order. I wrote a book on beauty and was impressed by proportion

14. Why did I dedicate it to Hierius. I admired him for his ability, but also because others admired him.

15. I attributed beauty to unity.

16. When I was twenty I read Aristotle's Categories and understood them immediately, even though others did so only with great difficulty, and the philosophers who wrote commentaries on them were very celebrated. But I gained nothing, for they do not apply to the relation between You and Your attributes, since you are identical with them. [Note: this is one of the most pervasive problems in medieval philosophy.] I easily learned the liberal arts, but what good did it do me, since I was lost in error and sacrilege?

Book V

1. Accept my confessions.

2. The wicked fly from you, but they cannot escape, since you are everywhere.

3. The twenty-ninth year of my age: I met Faustus, the Manichee bishop who I had been told would answer all my questions. But he could not. The Manichees not only contradict the Catholic doctrines, but also the results of science.

4. To know God but not science is better than the alternative, and knowing science contributes nothing to happiness above knowing God.

5. It was ridiculous of Mani to incorporate fake science into his religion, and it is ridiculous of Christians to dilute doctrine with false opinions of science.

6. Faustus was charming and a good speaker, but he was not a scholar.

7. I became convinced by Faustus that my difficulties with Manicheism could never be answered.

8. I went to Rome, to avoid the disorderly students. But the students in Rome were dishonest. You arranged it to further my salvation. I lied to my mother and left secretly.
9. I got sick in Rome and nearly died. My mother’s heart would have been broken if I had died unbaptized, but you did not permit that to happen, and I recovered.

10. I began to adopt academic skepticism, but still associated with the Manichees. I could not believe you had a bodily form, but thought of you, and evil also, as great masses. I did not believe in the Incarnation, for I thought flesh would defile God.

11. In Carthage I had been impressed by the scriptural arguments of Elpidius against the Manichees. The Manichees said the New Testament had been tampered with, but they could produce no original copies.

12. The students sometimes avoided paying their fees in an unscrupulous way.

13. I sought and obtained a position in Milan. I met Ambrose and listened to his sermons. He was a great speaker, and gradually his content impressed itself upon me. He taught figurative interpretation of Scripture [another pervasive theme in medieval philosophy, whether of the Hebrew Bible, the Christian Bible, or the Koran]. I was in a state of suspension in my beliefs, and remained a catecumen in the Catholic Church.

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Book VI

1. My mother joined me. She believed that before she died, I would be baptized.

2. My mother easily obeyed Ambrose’s order to desist from offerings to the dead. She was devoted to Ambrose, and he warmed to her.

3. I could never speak to Ambrose in detail about my doubts about the faith, but I learned that God is considered to be a spiritual being, and to everywhere and always.

4. I wanted the certainty of arithmetic in matters of faith.

5. I began to prefer the Catholic teaching. I realized that I believed countless things on the testimony of others. I had always believed in You in some form, and now I began to put more trust in the Bible, since it had attained widespread acceptance. I learned that it had a deeper, or inner meaning.

6. I was eager for fame, wealth, and marriage, but You only derided these ambitions. The drunk was happier than I, for his joys were less false.

7. Alypius, from Thagaste, who loved the games in the amphitheater, joined me and became my student in Carthage, in spite of his father’s dislike for me. He fell in with my superstitious beliefs.

8. He had gone to Rome before me, and again had gotten caught up in the gladiatorial games.


10. Uprightness of Alypius. Nebridius, also from Thagaste, came to Milan to join me in my search for wisdom.

11. Rehearsal of the history of his quest and indecision.

12. Arguments with Alypius about marriage.

13. I became engaged to a girl too young to marry by two years, with my mother’s encouragement.

14. A group of friends planned to form a community and live apart from the world, but the plan came to naught.
15. My concubine was torn from me as being an impediment to my marriage, and I suffered. I took another mistress, but still grieved for my earlier one. [This has always seemed so strange to me. Augustine never even mentions her name.]

16. My friends and I discussed the nature of good and evil. Epicurus would have won, except that I believed the soul was immortal.